

MAKING AMERICA OPERATIC:
SIX COMPOSERS' ATTEMPTS AT AN
AMERICAN OPERA, 1910–1918

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores six selected operas written by American composers and librettists from the 1910s, the earliest decade in which this nation supported the widespread and frequent production of operas by native artists. Example works by Charles Wakefield Cadman, Frederick Converse, Henry Hadley, Victor Herbert, Mary Carr Moore, and Arthur Nevin exemplify a shared goal to enact on the operatic stage indigenous stories with American characters, in competition against a field dominated by imported repertoire and singers.

The opening chapter examines the nation's cultural scene at the beginning of the twentieth century, focusing on the position of opera within the broader American music debate. The second chapter outlines the genesis of each project and follows the path of each work leading up to their stage premieres. The central chapters present in-depth analyses of the librettos and musical style of these scores, illustrating the emergence of a distinctively American operatic outlook during the decade. Reception history provides a central point of reference throughout these analytical chapters. The final chapter resumes the narrative of chapter two by highlighting the audience response to the premiere performances and the subsequent production history of these operas following their premieres.

Throughout this study, it is apparent that the Americanist motivation more strongly associated with composers of a younger (and more modernist-leaning) generation was indeed a powerful force, even among tradition-bound composers of the 1910s. Despite their adoption of European-inherited musical styles and operatic conventions, the selected composers and librettists still intensely desired for audiences to receive their works as definitively American creations. Thus, a reassessment of the period's cultural context and a reexamination of the scores themselves yield new insights into an exciting stage in the development of American opera.

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*In memory of my grandmother
—pianist and music-lover—
Mary Ziegel (1916–2011)*

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American operas of the past have generally been preserved in a silent limbo called “print,” located in tombs of learning called “libraries.” There, in stacks seldom disturbed by a curious hand, are the heroes and villains, the happy or tragic lovers, the adventurers and plotters, the leaders and the followers that inhabit the alluring land of opera. Of course, the music is there too—for those who know how to read it.¹

—Gilbert Chase

[T]he standard references give an impression of poverty. What is so terribly irritating to me is that European music gets all the adjectives and verbs, while American music is limited to nouns. In other words, European operas are dealt with in lively discussions, while American operas are given only as titles and composers’ names on supplementary lists.²

—Edith Borroff

¹ Gilbert Chase, *America’s Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 545.

² Edith Borroff, “American Opera: An Early Suggestion of Context,” in *Opera and the Golden West: The Past, Present, and Future of Opera in the U.S.A.*, ed. John L. DiGaetani and Josef P. Sirefman (Cranbury, N. J.: Associated University Presses, 1994), 22.

INTRODUCTION

The cultural currents seemed right for American opera at the beginning of the twentieth century. A confluence of factors—from performers and music critics to opera-producing institutions and audiences—all contributed to the demand for new operas by native composers. Responding to this call, American composers penned more operas than ever before. The genre at last attracted a regular stream of compositional activity, in stark contrast to the infrequent and sporadic appearances of indigenously composed scores during the preceding hundred years. Yet this period's style of American opera was a short-lived phenomenon. The impact of war and the subsequent critical and academic privileging of a select group of modernists made the aesthetic of the 1900s and 1910s, with its dependence upon elements inherited from European, nineteenth-century Romanticism, seem dated and not even especially American, in terms of both musical and plot content. By mid-century, the major opera companies concerned themselves with the continuance of the canonical European repertoire and the most current American works, rather than the revival of moderate successes from years past. Critics might fondly remember a favorite moment from prior seasons, but none called for restagings. Thus, since not one American opera from the first two decades of the twentieth century has managed to enter the performance repertoire, all of this period's operas must ultimately be considered failures along this front.

The general pattern is the same with any opera project from these years that achieved the goal of a fully staged performance. Critics and audience members alike eagerly awaited the premiere. Upon actually seeing the opera performed, however, critics voiced their disappointment. The librettos were the primary target of critical ire, with the music generally receiving greater approval. Audiences, meanwhile, provided composers with a more generous

reception. Even if each season boasted a premiere or two, the arrival of a new American opera was still rare enough to elicit an enthusiastic response. With enough audience support, some of these works managed to maintain a tenuous position in the repertoire of a single company for an extra season or two. Perhaps neighboring cities might get to see a performance if the opera company toured, or a particularly intrepid and persistent composer might manage to achieve a revival performance years later. But for the most part, after only a few years these works vanished from the repertoire completely. A present-day revival of any American opera from the first two decades of the twentieth century is the rarest of exceptions. The titles of these operas receive little more than passing mention in the standard references. Published piano-vocal scores remain more accessible on the shelves of many music libraries, but performing materials are not readily available.

The sheer amount of operatic activity during this period indicates that this is a far more significant segment of the repertoire than our modern performance canon might suggest. At least 55 new operas by American composers received first performances between 1900 and 1920.¹ In brief, the nation's artistic climate held all the necessary ingredients to foster this level of operatic activity. By the early years of the twentieth century, each of the nation's major cities could claim its own permanent opera venue or resident opera company. New York City opened its Metropolitan Opera in 1883 and established its own resident company in 1908. From 1906 to 1910, the city was home to a Met competitor, Oscar Hammerstein's rival Manhattan Opera

¹ Arriving at an exact count is difficult, as the standard bibliographical checklists are either outdated or under-researched, and are inconsistent in their distinction between serious grand opera and lighter genres like operetta, comic opera and musical play. My count of 55 derives from Cameron Northouse, *Twentieth Century Opera in England and the United States* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1976), 1–19. Northouse's book provides a chronological listing of operas by American and British composers, which I then cross-checked against Edward Ellsworth Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1934) in order to separate what observers at the time considered true grand operas from the lighter works that played at entirely different, non-operatic venues. Thus, a work like Sousa's *The Free Lance* (1906) or Herbert's *Naughty Marietta* (1910) is not included in the count.

Company. Boston witnessed the founding of its own local opera house and resident company in 1909, while the Chicago Grand Opera Company launched its first season in 1910. On the opposite end of the country, Los Angeles and Seattle, although without their own resident organizations, had a thriving opera scene thanks to touring opera troupes.² These companies were willing and able to stage new works by native composers alongside the established European repertory staples, a trend which coincides with the more adventurous producers' introduction of some of Europe's most modern contemporary works, such as *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Salome* and the operas of Puccini.

While the United States did not supply dedicated opera librettists to the same extent as European nations, writers both professional and amateur were eager to provide composers with appropriate texts. Singers both native and foreign sought the opportunity to portray American roles on the stage. The nation's music critics, writing for specialist music journals, literary or cultural magazines and the daily newspapers, frequently directed their pens toward the operatic scene, thereby bringing opera culture to the attention of a broad readership. Many writers were frustrated with the complete absence of successful American works in the standard repertory. Composers were more than eager to respond to this call.

Indeed, when taken as a whole, the opera composers at work during the first twenty years of the 20th century make up this country's first and now-overlooked school of national opera. They represent an American extension of the work of such nineteenth-century composers as Carl Maria von Weber, Daniel Auber, Mikhail Glinka, Giuseppe Verdi, Ferenc Erkel, Stanisław Moniuszko and Bedřich Smetana, each of whom helped to define a national style of opera in

² Here I have only noted the cities which figure in to the histories of the six operas examined in my dissertation. Operas were presented in most other major U.S. cities as well. Some had their own resident companies; others were visited by companies from the Met or from Chicago on tour. Enterprising touring opera troupes also brought opera to the nation's smaller cities.

their own respective countries. (Isolated nineteenth-century American examples—the operas of William Henry Fry, George Frederic Bristow, or Walter Damrosch—are more derivative in style rather than distinctively nationalist.³) This present dissertation, then, is an exploration into the aesthetic characteristics of American opera as exemplified in six works by six different composers. Any one of these was a potential yet unsuccessful candidate (since none managed to earn a place in the repertoire) for the role of American National Opera.

Selection Process

In order to narrow the potential field of early twentieth-century American operas down to a more focused and viable group for purposes of comparison, I employed the following criteria:

- [1] A selected work must have received at least one fully staged performance. An opera project had to be completely realized for inclusion in my list, for it could only have an impact on the nation's broader artistic landscape if given a full, theatrical production. Unperformed or unstaged works have been excluded.
- [2] A selected opera must have been published in close proximity to its premiere. A published score allows for the dissemination of an opera beyond the confines of the performance venue, enabling a work to influence more than just those who attended in person. American publishers generally issued piano-vocal scores rather than full scores during this period.

³ William Henry Fry's *Leonora* (1845) and *Notre Dame of Paris* (1864), George Frederick Bristow's *Rip Van Winkle* (1855), or Walter Damrosch's *The Scarlet Letter* (1896) stand out as singularities rather than marking the beginnings of a school of American opera.

[3] A selected work had to be a serious, through-composed opera.⁴ At the time, both composers and audience members alike would have thought of these works as “grand operas” in distinction to the period’s lighter forms variously called operetta, comic opera, musical play, or musical comedy. Regarding the selected repertoire, the composers’ intent to write a work that would fit alongside the canonic European operatic tradition in terms of both musical style and performance venue is a key factor for inclusion. In contrast to grand opera, the lighter genres of musical theater occupied a separate artistic niche, with entirely different venues and performers, if not necessarily different composers.

[4] The libretto of a selected opera must provide an indigenous setting. Excluded are works by American composers that are set in Europe (e.g., Horatio Parker’s *Mona*) or in imaginary locales (e.g., F. S. Converse’s *The Pipe of Desire*). As many commentators of the time explained, a potential American National Opera should be set in the New World.

These limits yield a group of six works: Arthur Nevin’s *Poia*, Victor Herbert’s *Natoma*, Frederick Shepherd Converse’s *The Sacrifice*, Mary Carr Moore’s *Narcissa*, Henry Hadley’s *Azora: The Daughter of Montezuma*, and Charles Wakefield Cadman’s *Shanewis: The Robin Woman*. From this selection, five further criteria of consistency emerge:

[5] Each opera plot includes Native American (Indian) characters in either major or minor roles, thus revealing what would have seemed an obvious source of “Americanness” for the operas’ creators at the time. This aspect also connects these works to broader artistic trends in both contemporary literature and film.

⁴ Gustav Kobbé’s 1922 observation helps to justify this criterion: “[I]f anything has been demonstrated over and over again, it is that American audiences of today simply will not stand for spoken dialogue in grand opera.” See Gustav Kobbé, *The Complete Opera Book* (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1922), 77–8.

[6] All six operas were produced within a narrow time frame, 1910–1918. (This range accounts for fully staged premieres. Composition dates extend into the previous decade.) This demonstrates a focal point of operatic activity, with six composers all working at the same time, struggling with the same issues, and offering alternative solutions to the same problem—how to compose American opera.

[7] This group offers a widespread geographical distribution. Each opera received its stage premiere in a different city, thus presenting a broader national picture and serving as a corrective to the New York-centric bias of much of the earlier literature on opera in America.

[8] Each work received significant press coverage and contemporary critical commentary. This allows for a measure of their immediate artistic impact. Attention from the press argues for a more far-reaching influence.⁵

[9] All six composers employ a relatively conservative harmonic vocabulary and musical aesthetic, especially in comparison to the contemporaneous styles of European modernists (late Debussy, mature Stravinsky) or American experimentalists (Ives, Ornstein). This style was, however, the period’s mainstream musical language among American composers and is in line with the compositional language of the leading European opera composers of the period (Puccini, Massenet, Mascagni).

Since all were staged, published, and discussed in the press, these works were known around the country, enough to have an impact on the nation’s musical scene in general. Moreover, each

⁵ Richard Crawford explains, “Whatever it may suggest about the size and makeup of the listening audience, the sophisticated level of musical discussion in newspapers shows the respect in which turn-of-the-century Americans held classical music.” See *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 498.

opera served as a point of reference for those that followed, as these six composers were well aware of each other's work.

Table of Operas, giving date and location of premieres

COMPOSER	OPERA	DATE OF STAGE PREMIERE	CITY
Nevin	<i>Poia</i>	23 April 1910	Berlin
Herbert	<i>Natoma</i>	25 February 1911	Philadelphia
Converse	<i>The Sacrifice</i>	3 March 1911	Boston
Moore	<i>Narcissa</i>	22 April 1912	Seattle
Hadley	<i>Azora</i>	26 December 1917	Chicago
Cadman	<i>Shanewis</i>	23 March 1918	New York

Composers and Their Operas

In order to introduce readers to these relatively unfamiliar composers and works, it seems worthwhile to briefly introduce each opera writer and provide basic plot summaries. Since detailed biographies are readily available, I include only an opera-focused overview here. More thorough plot synopses taken from primary sources are given in Appendix B. Appendix C provides cast lists for the premiere productions. Composers below appear in the order in which their operas were premiered.

Arthur Nevin (1871–1943), younger brother of the somewhat more familiar Ethelbert, studied piano with Karl Klindworth and composition with Engelbert Humperdinck in Germany. At the invitation of the ethnologist Walter McClintock, Nevin spent the summers of 1902 and 1903 living on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana. His opera *Poia* grew out of these experiences. The libretto by Randolph Hartley is based upon a Blackfeet legend collected by McClintock. Nevin incorporated into the score Blackfeet melodies he collected on his visits to

the reservation. *Poia*, the first of two operas by Nevin, was never staged in the United States during the composer's lifetime. It received one trial performance in a concert setting in Pittsburgh (16 January 1907) before being presented at the White House as an "illustrated lecture" for President Theodore Roosevelt. Finally produced in Berlin at the Royal Opera, the work was a controversial failure, with the German press inflaming a negative public reaction against an American composer's opera.⁶

The plot involves the title character Poia, his beloved Natoya, and his rival Sumatsi. Poia bears a scar across his face, given to him by the sun god Natosi as a mark of the evil of humanity. When Natoya rejects Poia because of his disfigurement, he decides to travel to the realm of the sun god to demand the removal of the scar. While there, Poia saves the life of Episua, the sun god's son, and as a reward, Natosi heals Poia's scar and sends him back to humankind as his prophet. Once returned, Poia is able to win back Natoya from the evil Sumatsi with the aid of a magic pipe given to him by the sun god. Natosi strikes Sumatsi dead with a lightning bolt and welcomes Poia and Natoya into the realm of the gods.

Victor Herbert (1859–1924) and his opera *Natoma* are by far the best known of this group. Herbert, master of the American operetta, composed only two operas. *Natoma*, his first, was originally planned for Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company but that production fell through when Hammerstein sold out to the more powerful Metropolitan Opera. It found a new home with the joint company of Philadelphia and Chicago which produced the work for three consecutive seasons. The libretto by Joseph Redding, himself an opera composer, drew much criticism for its stilted and archaic use of the English language, but Herbert's accessible

⁶ Personal information on Nevin is relatively scarce. A "biographical sketch" is included in John C. Francis, "*The Economites* by Arthur F. Nevin: A Critical Edition and Study of a Lost Opera" (M.M. thesis, Ohio University, 1996), 1–5. Also see Arthur Nevin, "Two Summers with the Blackfeet Indians of Montana," *Musical Quarterly* 2 (1916): 257–70.

music and the performances of Mary Garden as Natoma and John McCormack as the male lead, Paul, helped to make the work a popular success.⁷

The opera is set in Spanish-controlled California and brings together conflicting groups of Spanish, Indians and Americans. The plot hinges upon two overlapping love-triangles. Natoma, an Indian maiden, falls in love first with Paul, an American naval lieutenant. Paul, however, falls in love with Barbara, daughter of a Spanish aristocrat and Natoma's friend since childhood, who returns his love. Barbara, however, is already promised to the Spaniard Alvarado. Alvarado teams up with Castro, an Indian of mixed blood, in order to break up the relationship between Paul and Barbara. They plan to kidnap her at a civic fiesta. Natoma manages to stop their nefarious plan by accepting Castro's challenge to compete in the Dagger Dance. She prevents the kidnapping of Barbara and kills the treacherous Alvarado. Having committed this crime before a crowd at a public festival, Natoma, who had previously rejected the Christian teachings of the local priest, seeks sanctuary at the Mission church, becomes a nun, and ultimately blesses the union of Paul and Barbara.

Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871–1940) studied composition in the U.S. with John Knowles Paine and George Whitefield Chadwick, and in Munich with Gabriel Rheinberger. Converse held significant academic positions, having taught at Harvard and the New England Conservatory, where he eventually rose to dean of the faculty. He can also claim credit as the first American composer to have an opera performed by the Metropolitan Opera Company. The Met presented his by then five-year-old *The Pipe of Desire* in 1910. *The Sacrifice*, set to the composer's own prose libretto (with additional poetic lyrics by John Macy), was Converse's

⁷ Of the several book length biographies on Victor Herbert, the best are Neil Gould, *Victor Herbert: A Theatrical Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) and Edward N. Waters, *Victor Herbert: A Life in Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1955).

second of four operas. It was produced by the Boston Opera Company, where Converse was a vice president and one of the organization's founders. Similar to its exact contemporary *Natoma*, *The Sacrifice* is set in Mexico and presents a clash of cultures between the Americans and the Mexicans, with gypsies thrown in for added exotic color. The Indian characters in this opera act more as observers rather than participants in the plot.⁸

A love triangle centered on a Mexican aristocrat named Chonita motivates the plot. Two army officers, the Mexican Bernal and the American Burton, vie for her love. Burton is providing protection and security for Chonita's estate, while Bernal is plotting to drive out the newly arrived American forces. Bernal hopes to kill Burton as "a sacrifice" to send a signal that the Americans are not welcome. Tomasa, an old Indian servant, mourns the end of the Indian way of life and is the lone character with foresight enough to predict the tragedy that concludes the story. The complicated plot involves various battles, disguises, spies, and manipulation, while Converse's music emphasizes the requited love between Bernal and Chonita along with Burton's struggle to decide between his own love for Chonita and his sense of duty as an American soldier. In the end, Burton willingly sacrifices his own life to protect the American troops under his command and to allow Chonita and Bernal to escape to freedom. "All that man can do, I do for you," he sings to Chonita as he dies, making himself the titular sacrifice.

Mary Carr Moore (1873–1957) is the exception within this group; its only female member, she had no European training and spent her entire career in West Coast states, thus she remained somewhat removed from the artistic circles in which her male contemporaries operated. Originally trained as an operatic soprano, Moore was active throughout her life as a

⁸ Robert J. Garofalo, *Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871–1940): His Life and Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994) is the only modern biography. Equally valuable is an earlier study written by one of Converse's pupils with the cooperation of the composer: Ruth Severance, "The Life and Work of Frederick Shepherd Converse" (M.A. thesis, Boston University, 1932).

composition teacher and conductor, endlessly promoting her own works and advocating for performances of her four operas and four operettas. *Narcissa*, her first grand opera, sets a libretto by her mother, Sarah Pratt Carr, which dramatizes the real-life slaying of the missionaries Narcissa and Marcus Whitman by the Indians they were attempting to educate and convert. This work lacks many of the period's typical operatic features. Set pieces and arias are few; instead sung dialogue flows in an almost documentary-like fashion. The work, however, does strive to present these troubling historical events in an honest, non-judgmental fashion.⁹

The story begins with Marcus Whitman's call to be a missionary, Narcissa's desire to accompany him westward, and their on-the-spot marriage ceremony. Act 2 re-enacts life at the frontier Fort Vancouver and the arrival of the Whitmans. Act 3 depicts the growing tensions between the Indians and the white settlers. Even within the Indian community, conflicting groups either welcome or resent the Whitmans' involvement in their lives. In the final act, a group of antagonistic Indians kills the missionaries for siding with the ever-increasing population of white settlers, who, as the opera admits, are destroying the Indian way of life.

Henry Hadley (1871–1937) studied composition with Chadwick in Boston and Ludwig Thuille (himself a Rheinberger pupil) in Munich. Hadley was an early admirer of the works of Richard Strauss, counting him as an important style influence, and became one of the most significant American conductors of his generation. He traveled the globe as a guest conductor and helped to found the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. He holds a noteworthy claim as the first composer ever to conduct his own opera at the Metropolitan, leading *Cleopatra's Night* in 1920, but not until its sixth performance. *Azora: The Daughter of Montezuma* is Hadley's third

⁹ Catherine Parsons Smith and Cynthia S. Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore: American Composer* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1987) provides a comprehensive picture of Moore's life and works. Information on the factual Whitmans and their missionary work can be found in Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Converting the West: A Biography of Narcissa Whitman* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

of eight operas (in addition to several other operettas and a musical). Hadley himself conducted the premiere production by the Chicago Opera Association. David Stevens's libretto was widely criticized as one of the worst opera libretti ever heard.¹⁰

The plot of *Azora* echoes Verdi's *Aida* by transplanting the action to Aztec Mexico. Both works share similar musical set pieces—exotic prayers, a triumphal march, grand opera-style choruses—making the debt to Verdi's precedent unmistakable. The Aztec princess Azora is in love with Xalca, a captive prince of an enemy tribe. Xalca intends to lead Montezuma's army to victory over another enemy and asks for the hand of Azora in return, a promise which Montezuma gladly makes. Unfortunately, the Aztec General Ramatzin has a previous claim of betrothal to Azora, thus setting up the plot's motivating love triangle. Montezuma is depicted as a religious zealot, tied to the old traditions, especially the practice of human sacrifice, while his sister, Papantzin, has seen a vision of Christ and the eminent arrival of Cortez and his ships. Azora rejects Ramatzin, who then turns Montezuma against Xalca. Montezuma vows to execute Xalca when he returns. Because Xalca has been away longer than expected, Ramatzin will head off to war with another portion of Montezuma's army and demands the same reward as Xalca had been promised—Azora's hand in marriage for victory in battle. But just as this promise is made, Xalca returns victorious. He is immediately taken prisoner, and when Azora refuses to marry Ramatzin, Montezuma orders the execution of both Azora and Xalca the next day. While awaiting the execution, Papantzin again explains her visions of Christ's salvation to her niece Azora. Just as the execution is about to take place, Cortez and his conquistadors arrive and halt the proceedings. The opera ends not with a dramatic confrontation but instead with a static

¹⁰ The principal biographical sources are John C. Canfield, "Henry Kimball Hadley: His Life and Works (1871–1937)" (Ed.D. diss., Florida State University, 1960) and Herbert R. Boardman, *Henry Hadley: Ambassador of Harmony* (Atlanta, Ga.: Banner Press, 1932).

tableau of the Christian Spaniards (joined by Azora, Xalca, and Papantzin) on one side of the stage facing the heathen Aztecs on the opposite side, as the full company sings to the final curtain.

Charles Wakefield Cadman (1881–1946), like Moore, never traveled to Europe for training. Among this group of composers, Cadman is the one most closely associated with the so-called Indianist movement in American music. One of his compositional aims was to “idealize” borrowed Indian melodies by setting them in an art-song idiom. (“From the Land of the Sky-Blue Waters” is by far the most popular of these and even became an oft-recorded dance-band standard.) He intended such works for a wide audience, straddling the line between parlor song and art music. Nelle Richmond Eberhart was Cadman’s close collaborator on these projects, providing him with both song lyrics and opera libretti. *Shanewis* is the first of three Indianist operas by Cadman.¹¹ He composed six operas and four operettas in total. The plot idea for *Shanewis* came from Tsianina Redfeather, a Cherokee-Creek Indian trained as an operatic soprano, who supposedly based the story on events from her own life. Tsianina was another of Cadman’s close collaborators; together the two traveled across the United States performing lecture-recitals on Indian music which featured Cadman’s “idealized” arrangements. Although Sophie Braslau created the title role at the premiere, Tsianina did eventually perform “her own” role in later revivals. Although the sixth American opera presented at the Metropolitan, *Shanewis* was the first one based upon an indigenous subject and the first opera at the Met with a libretto by an American woman. It also became that institution’s first American work to appear in two

¹¹ Sometimes the title also appears as *The Robin Woman*.

consecutive seasons. Of these six selected scores, *Shanewis* is the only one set in the modern day.¹²

In the first half of this one-act opera, *Shanewis*, an Indian trained as an operatic soprano, sings two songs with an onstage piano accompanist (in Cadman's "idealized" style) for an audience gathered at the home of Mrs. Everton, *Shanewis*'s benefactress. Lionel, a young man in attendance, immediately falls in love with *Shanewis*, despite the fact that he is already engaged to Mrs. Everton's daughter, Amy (another love triangle...). *Shanewis* reciprocates his feelings, unaware of his engagement to Amy, her friend since childhood. An orchestral intermezzo prepares the transition to the second scene, an Indian reservation where a powwow is taking place. *Shanewis* has brought Lionel in order to introduce him to her people's way of life. She is confronted by Philip Harjo, a college-educated but embittered Indian, who accuses *Shanewis* of abandoning the tribe and choosing a white lover. He gives her a poisoned arrow and urges her to kill Lionel with it. Amy and Mrs. Everton arrive in pursuit of Lionel; *Shanewis* finally learns of Lionel and Amy's engagement. She willingly relinquishes Lionel's love, sings of the harm that the whites have inflicted upon her people, but rejects revenge. At the last moment, Philip Harjo snatches the poisoned arrow and stabs Lionel, who dies in *Shanewis*'s arms.

Literature and Methodology

This dissertation aims to pursue two principal lines of inquiry. The first is to present a picture of the era's artistic climate and cultural context as it pertains to opera. In this endeavor, I am picking up the historical narrative where previous writers have left off. Opera in nineteenth-

¹² Cadman explained his "idealized" use of Indian melodic materials in "The 'Idealization' of Indian Music," *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1915): 387–96. The most comprehensive biographical texts are Harry D. Perison, "Charles Wakefield Cadman: His Life and Works" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1978) and Arlouine G. Wu, *Constance Eberhart: A Musical Career in the Age of Cadman*, National Opera Association Monographs Series 4 (Oxford, Miss.: National Opera Association, 1983).

century America has received more scholarly attention than works from the beginning of the twentieth century. Karen Ahlquist, Katherine Preston and John Graziano focused their attention on the travelling opera troupes and celebrity singers that disseminated opera throughout the country during the nineteenth century; June C. Ottenberg offers a summary of the period.¹³ John Dizikes, in *Opera in America: A Cultural History*, covers a broad timeframe but focuses less on native composers and indigenous works than he does on the performing institutions and singers that presented the operas of the European canon to American audiences.¹⁴ Single-city, regional, or opera company histories continue the trend of presenting the story of European operas as performed in the United States rather than the story of operas composed by Americans.¹⁵ The exceptionally thorough, composer- and work-centered *American Opera* by Elise Kirk is more interested in modern American opera (from the years following my selected date range), in addition to providing only a limited discussion of the music.¹⁶ My work here fills a gap in our historiography by amplifying what has thus far only been lightly touched upon. I advance the narrative of the nation's operatic scene into the early twentieth century and situate the position of the opera genre within broader cultural trends.

¹³ Karen Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815–60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Katherine K. Preston, “Between the Cracks: The Performance of English-Language Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” *American Music* 21 (Autumn, 2003): 349–74; John Graziano, “An Opera for Every Taste: The New York Scene, 1862–1869,” in *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900*, ed. John Graziano (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 253–72; and June C. Ottenberg, *Opera Odyssey: Toward a History of Opera in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994).

¹⁴ John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹⁵ Ronald L. Davis, *Opera in Chicago* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966) and *A History of Opera in the American West* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965); Quaintance Eaton, *The Boston Opera Company* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1965); Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1966: A Candid History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966); John Fredrick Cone, *Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966); and Catherine Parsons Smith, *Making Music in Los Angeles: Transforming the Popular* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Elise K. Kirk, *American Opera* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

My second focal point is the purely musical and textual aspects of these operas as a group. Despite the extant literature on the six operas selected here, the field is wide open when it comes to analysis rooted in the music and sung texts of these works. Some previous writers have separately focused on these operas individually.¹⁷ Others have examined American opera at New York's Metropolitan Opera House in isolation.¹⁸ Harold Briggs's 1976 thesis on Indianist operas includes five of my six selected works but remains primarily descriptive rather than analytical.¹⁹ In contrast, my dissertation is the first of its kind to synthesize the interconnections among these works by tracing their overlapping musical, textual, and dramaturgical features while positioning them within a nuanced discussion of the time's broader cultural context. In sum, my work seeks to assess the shared sense of nationalist expression among this group of composers and librettists, as they strove to tackle the complex genre of grand opera.²⁰

Scholarship on the emergence of a distinctively American musical style generally focuses on composers of the generation following my selected group.²¹ Gershwin, Copland, and other

¹⁷ Kris A. Bjerke, "Perspectives of the Operas of Charles Wakefield Cadman" (M.M. thesis, Bowling Green University, 1992); Gary Willilam Mayhood, "Charles Wakefield Cadman and His Opera *Shanewis*" (M.M. thesis, Kansas State University, 1991); Harry D. Perison, "The 'Indian' Operas of Charles Wakefield Cadman," *College Music Symposium* 22, no. 2 (1982): 20–48; Rosemary Gainer, "Natoma, by Victor Herbert: An American 'Grand' Opera?" *Opera Journal* 29, no. 4 (1996): 12–23; Gail A. Miller, "Victor Herbert's *Natoma*: The Creation of an American Grand Opera" (M.A. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1994); and Moiya Callahan, "Mary Carr Moore's *Narcissa*" (M.M. thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1999).

¹⁸ James William Glass, "American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910–1920" (M.M. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1971) and Carolyn Guzski, "American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910–1935: A Contextual History and Critical Survey of Selected Works" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2001).

¹⁹ Harold E. Briggs, "The North American Indian as Depicted in Musical Compositions, Culminating with American 'Indianist' Operas of the Early Twentieth Century: 1900–1930" (M.M. thesis, Indiana University, 1976). Hadley's *Azora* is the exception not included in Briggs's study. Because his time frame extends a decade beyond mine, he also includes a later opera by Cadman, *The Sunset Trail* (1922), Francesco de Leone's *Alglala* (1924), and Eleanor Everest Freer's *The Chilkoot Maiden* (unproduced).

²⁰ Julie Schnepel pursues the symphonic complement to my operatic study in "The Critical Pursuit of the Great American Symphony, 1893–1950," (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1995).

²¹ See for instance Alan Howard Levy, *Musical Nationalism: American Composers' Search for Identity* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983); Barbara L. Tischler, *An American Music: The Search for an American Musical Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the*

later composers are considered the defining figures, while the composers of the generation examined here are quickly brushed over as inconsequential predecessors, too closely tied to a shopworn European tradition. The standard narrative of American music advances the position that a distinctly American idiom could only emerge through modernism's search for new sounds.²² I, however, argue that my six composers, a generation earlier, were indeed already pursuing similar goals in these operas. Given that historiography privileges artistic breakthroughs over a continuing tradition, this study will help to balance our understanding of the period by focusing on a group of American non-mavericks.

Chapter Overview

I have structured this dissertation thematically in order to better approach these operas as a group, rather than individually. My scope begins broadly, with the nation's cultural and artistic context, and then spirals ever more specifically towards the music itself. Through a topical organization—instead of an opera-by-opera treatment—I am better able to draw out the connections among my six selected works.

Chapter 1 (Overture: Answering the Call for American Opera) establishes the position of grand opera within this nation's cultural life during the 1910s. Starting with a consideration of the broader American music debate, I explore the specific ramifications of this discourse regarding opera. While many period commentators address both the nation's readiness

1920s (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Michael Broyles, *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004); or Christina Lee Kopp, "'A school of new men': Composing an American Identity in the Early Twentieth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2006).

²² Nicholas Tawa offers an exception to this view, giving due consideration to the turn-of-the-century American Romantics. Opera is a secondary focus, however, with instrumental music and symphonic music receiving more of his attention. See *The Coming of Age of American Art Music: New England's Classical Romanticists* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) and *Mainstream Music of Early Twentieth Century America: The Composers, Their Times, and Their Works* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992). This second book includes Converse, Hadley and Cadman; even Moore's *Narcissa* receives a passing notice.

for a school of national American opera and express a desire for operas by native composers, other points of view offset this pro-American strain. Composers had to confront the pervasive perception of opera as an imported European genre, whose foreignness makes it an unnatural outlet for American talents.

Chapter 2 (Expectations: From Conception to Premiere) describes the sense of anticipation leading up to each opera's premiere and addresses the sense of hopefulness that critics and composers alike invested in these works. Essentially, this is a pre-performance reception history—the critical discourse prior to each work's actual premiere. My narrative is situated within the framework of “national opera,” building upon the definitions of Carl Dahlhaus and Richard Taruskin, in which public perceptions play a significant role. This chapter also traces the genesis of each opera, through an exploration of the compositional and planning efforts, the writing of the librettos, and the often deeply personal connections that composers and librettists brought to their work. I also address the numerous pre-production complications that hindered the progress of new American operas on their path to the stage.

Chapter 3 (Writing in “Operese”: Plots and Librettos) focuses on the shared textual features and plot themes that link these works as a group. This chapter explores the critical debate over whether English is an appropriate language for operatic performance. I investigate the motives behind, and the critical reaction to, the decision to employ American topics and Indian characters on the operatic stage, a trend best understood within the context of the long nineteenth-century's tradition of American literature on Indian themes and with contemporaneous silent filmmakers' strikingly similar treatment of Indian plot types. The content of each libretto, however, is not exclusively indigenous. As one might expect of an imported genre, composers and librettists looked to the established European masterpieces for

models, balancing distinctively American themes with borrowed operatic conventions. I also analyze the style of English used in the libretti, particularly how language style choices are used to characterize American and Indian roles. Much of the sung text presents a formal, archaic variety of English—what one critic identified as “operese”—rather than a conversational or vernacular idiom. This situation posed one of the greatest barriers against widespread acceptance of these works, as a look at the critical reception reveals.

Chapter 4 (Soundworld I: Musical Ingredients of American Opera) next turns from the text to the music, offering an overview of the musical components which, together, make up the composite musical style of these works. One focus is on elements inherited from the European tradition, particularly the American response to Wagnerism as a stylistic model. Counterbalancing these European-derived elements, I again take up the Americanist angle and examine the intentions behind the incorporation of quoted Indian musical material within an operatic context. This chapter also considers the topic of orchestration, an issue which received much commentary in period reviews and press coverage.

Chapter 5 (Soundworld II: A Stylistic Analysis) continues to pursue a comparative analysis by examining analogous musical examples from all six operas. This includes music for Indian characters (i.e., those passages incorporating borrowed Indian melodic materials), American characters, romantic relationships, sacred music within the operatic context, and large-scale scenic construction. My aim is to emphasize the patterns of stylistic consistency found throughout this repertory. Additionally, period critical commentary supports my analysis and reveals opinions that do not always justify the present neglect of these works. Taken together, these three analytical chapters provide a thorough overview of the period’s style of American opera.

Chapter 6 (Curtain: Audience Reception and Later Revivals), the final chapter, returns to the narrative of reception history by highlighting the audience reactions that greeted each opera's premiere. Primary-source performance reviews again situate this narrative. Although none of these operas earned a permanent place in the repertoire, they managed to avoid disappearing completely through performances of excerpts in concert, illustrated lectures at local opera clubs, a scant few commercially released recordings of excerpts, and the rarest of exceptions: a revival or restaging. This subsequent performance history is indicative of changing tastes, resulting in the decline of this American brand of Romanticism as the twentieth century progressed. Ultimately, these operas represent hopes unfulfilled. My reappraisal, however, aims to restore these works to their rightful place at the vanguard of American operatic production, rescuing them from their unenviable, present-day status as an operatic footnote. By more accurately defining the picture of early twentieth-century American opera and its composers, and by filling out the shadowy figures and works that precede the repertory staples of modern American opera, we can begin to reconsider these and other scores that comprise the United States' forgotten tradition of late-Romantic opera.

CHAPTER 1 — Overture: Answering the Call for American Opera

[T]oday 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 composers have almost stopped trying their hands at this sadly neglected branch of our art. The struggle against the apathy of the public, eternally in love with flimsy operettas, ... and on the other hand against the commercial cowardice and avarice of the managers, seems hopeless. 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.¹

Oscar Sonneck penned this bleak assessment in 1905. Having surveyed the young nation's flourishing eighteenth-century climate for theatrical music (not quite operas, but rather stage plays with songs and incidental music), Sonneck lamented the fact that composers of his generation had little motivation to undertake a grand opera project and but slim chances to ever see it realized on stage. Certainly, the nineteenth century had little to offer in the way of American opera. The early efforts of William Henry Fry—*Leonora* (1845, revived 1858) and *Notre Dame of Paris* (1864)—and George Frederick Bristow's *Rip Van Winkle* (1855) found limited success, and because of their chronological isolation, they seem more like an aberration rather than the start of a trend. Composers such as Dudley Buck, Frederick Gleason, and Silas Pratt during the later part of the century more systematically pursued the genre of opera, but the majority of their works remained unperformed. In the decade before Sonneck's article appeared, even the operatic efforts of individuals as prestigious as Walter Damrosch (*The Scarlet Letter*, 1896), George Whitefield Chadwick (*Judith*, 1901), and John Knowles Paine (*Azara*, 1903) met

¹ Oscar Sonneck, "Early American Operas," *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* 6, no. 3 (1905): 485.

with little favor.² At the time of Sonneck's writing, these must have seemed more like an abortive start for a lost cause rather than the seeds of a school of national opera. The doors of New York's Metropolitan Opera had not once admitted the work of an American composer, and in 1905 the Met was the nation's only operatic venue that amounted to a permanent institution. In Sonneck's view, opera was in danger of becoming an exclusively European genre with little if any room for native works. His conclusion is anything but optimistic, and as if writing directly to us today, he predicted a meager scholarly future.

Somehow, Sonneck failed to anticipate the changes that were about to reshape the nation's operatic scene. By considering only the previous century's few precedents for American composers, he underestimated the nationwide audience for opera and the widespread theatrical infrastructure for operatic performance. The demand for a national style of American opera would soon spread throughout the country. Musicians, like Sonneck himself, continued to benefit from easy access to the highest level of (European) training and experience. Composers and performers alike were full participants in a modern, international musical scene. Contrary to Sonneck's fears, the stage was in fact set for an unprecedented period of operatic growth and activity.

How the nation's operatic fortunes could shift from the bleakness of Sonneck's vision to a fountain of opportunity for potential American opera composers in the 1910s is the focus of this chapter. Through an exploration of the ever-changing and often contradictory attitudes towards opera and the debate over the formation of an American national style, one underlying theme consistently emerges from the din: critics and the public alike were ready for an opera to call their own. This chapter aims to shed light on the period's perceptions of the genre, for it is

² *Azara*—not to be confused with Hadley's *Azora*—received only a concert performance with piano. *Judith* too was only given in concert.

out of this context that the six selected operas would eventually find their way to fully staged premieres. Contrary to Sonneck's worry, there is indeed very much to say.

* * * * *

The history of American opera in reality comprises two separate but complementary topics: [1] opera written by American composers and [2] European opera performed in the United States. The first of these areas is of course my primary focus in this dissertation. However, it is the second area that plays a central role in the nation's cultural life throughout the nineteenth century and that forms the legacy inherited by composers of the 1910s. Much work has already described the earlier period, so a brief overview here will suffice.³ As Sonneck was well aware, the American opera composer was a largely absent figure throughout the nineteenth century, excepting a few rare appearances. Opera itself, of course, flourished in abundance starting with the Garcia family's first performance of Rossini's *Barber of Seville* in 1825. For much of the century, opera was one of many genres of entertainment widely popular with the general public. Audiences encountered operas in both the original language and in English translations. Travelling opera troupes expanded the genre's reach by presenting performances throughout the nation, while the larger cities, especially New York, could count on numerous operatic performances throughout the year. The popular reach of opera extended into the home, where familiar opera extracts were performed in modified arrangements as parlor songs. Indeed,

³ For thorough studies of the entire period, see John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993); June C. Ottenberg, *Opera Odyssey: Toward a History of Opera in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994); and Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 85–104.

familiarity with both the music and stories of opera was a basic part of a mid-19th-century American's cultural background.⁴

In the years around the turn of the century, opera's position within the nation's cultural landscape grew increasingly stratified. Opera became an ever more elite genre—foreign singers performed works in foreign languages, inaccessible to the average American and patronized primarily by persons of wealth and members of immigrant communities. Katherine Preston describes this process as a “slow but almost insidious expropriation [of opera] by the wealthy and elite of American society” to the exclusion “of the other social classes that traditionally had been a normal part of the American theater audience.”⁵ What began as a commercial enterprise directed towards a broad popular audience—as opera was throughout the middle of the nineteenth century—gave way to a funding model in which managers could rarely recover the expense of staging opera through box office receipts. Instead, the support of wealthy patrons and financial backers was essential, thus further separating opera from the types of theatrical entertainment that attracted a more popular audience.

This is all part of the process that Lawrence Levine refers to as “sacralization.” Attending opera, for a certain segment of the American population, became like something of a ritual, with

⁴ Karen Ahlquist, focusing on New York City, and Katherine Preston, focusing on travelling opera troupes and English-language adaptations, have dealt with opera in antebellum United States. John Graziano picks up the New York City thread in the 1860s where Ahlquist left off, while Charles Hamm addresses the topic of opera extracts as popular parlor songs. See Karen Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815–60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) and “Between the Cracks: The Performance of English-Language Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” *American Music* 21 (Autumn, 2003): 349–74; John Graziano, “An Opera for Every Taste: The New York Scene, 1862–1869,” in *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 253–72; and Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 72–88.

Also see June C. Ottenberg, “New York and Philadelphia, 1825–1840: European Opera American Style,” and Phillipa Burgess, “Popular Opera and Bands in the American Civil War,” in *Opera and the Golden West: The Past, Present, and Future of Opera in the U.S.A.*, ed. John L. DiGaetani and Josef P. Sirefman (Cranbury, N. J.: Associated University Presses, 1994), 47–59 and 63–70 respectively.

⁵ Preston, *Opera on the Road*, 99–100.

the opera house itself a sort of temple for the celebration of an art form imported from Europe. The lavish design of an opera house reflected the wealth of the upper-class attendees, who were as prominently on display in their subscription boxes as were the costumed singers on stage. Much later, into the 1930s, composer Deems Taylor was still well aware of the harm inflicted by this peculiarly American state of affairs:

The backers of opera in this country have always been obsessed by the knowledge that opera in Europe is backed by wealth and aristocracy, and have ignored the fact that it is also attended by the proletariat. They have not, apparently, realized that the gallery of the Paris Opéra was full, even on nights when the imperial box was empty, and have, accordingly, built opera houses in which all the emphasis is on the boxes and the box-holders, with the common, run-of-the-mine public more or less of an afterthought.⁶

For the wealthy opera patrons, proving the quality of opera staged in the United States was a more pressing concern than appealing to a broader audience. Particularly in nineteenth-century New York, the presentation of recently composed operas (by Verdi and Wagner in particular) with the best European singers and conductors demonstrated, as John Graziano explains, that “New York [was] America’s most important up-to-date city.” For New York’s elite class, “seeing a recently composed opera was sure evidence that their city was equal to any major European capital.”⁷

This intentional cosmopolitanism did not necessarily confer upon opera the status of high art, even when American productions could match the level of Europe’s best. Nineteenth-century critics like John Sullivan Dwight, conductors such as Theodore Thomas, and music patrons including Henry Lee Higginson (who provided the financial support for the founding of the Boston Symphony) helped shape a perception that placed the symphony orchestra and orchestral

⁶ Deems Taylor, *Of Men and Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), 203

⁷ Graziano, “An Opera for Every Taste,” 257.

music at the pinnacle of the artistic pyramid.⁸ Thomas, for instance, famously noted, “A symphony orchestra shows the culture of a community, not opera. ... The masterworks of instrumental music are the language of the soul and express more than those of any other art.”⁹ Surely, Thomas believed that the untexted nature of instrumental genres allowed them to express “the language of the soul” in a fashion supposedly more universal than opera ever could.

Despite the fact that both opera and the symphony are equally European imports, opera’s “elite” and therefore anti-universal qualities made the genre seem suspect. The focus on the display of wealth and the fan-based support for star singers turned attending the opera into more of a social event than a musical or artistic one in the eyes of many observers. An untitled, anonymous editorial from the *New York Times* in 1883, for instance, recognized that “Fashion sends her votaries to the opera” simply because attending opera was the fashionable thing to do.¹⁰ For novelist Henry James, opera played “its part as the great vessel of social salvation, the comprehensive substitute for all other conceivable vessels.... In default of a court-function, our ladies of the tiaras and court-trains might have gone on to the opera-function, these occasions offering the only approach to the implication of the tiara known, so to speak, to the American law.”¹¹ As James’s comments imply, opera as fashion (rather than art) has much to do with the perception of the genre as a feminized form of entertainment. Kara Gardner explains how women attendees, “particularly the boxholders, became the enemy [of some critics] because of their bias in favor of European singers and conductors.” These critics “viewed women as opera’s

⁸ For a thorough discussion of Dwight, Thomas and Higginson, see Joseph Horowitz, *Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 15–93.

⁹ Theodore Thomas, *A Musical Autobiography: Vol. 1, Life Work*, ed. George P. Upton (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1905), 3. The quotation appears as the book’s epigraph.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, 17 July 1883.

¹¹ Henry James, *The American Scene* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1907), 164–5.

primary consumers, and blamed them for making it just another product of the new capitalist economy.”¹² If women audience members and financial support from female patrons made the performance of opera suspect in terms of high art, the music of opera at least opened a pathway towards that goal. The anonymous 1883 *Times* writer hoped that once a fashion-focused audience was at the opera, “art [would] claim them for her own” for opera could be “an efficient popularizing medium for good music.”¹³ The music heard at the opera, in this writer’s opinion, could shepherd an attendee from “fashionable” opera towards the better classes of music.

Yet to focus on operatic elitism and fashion, particularly if limited to the New York scene, overlooks the fact that opera remained an “art form that was *simultaneously* popular and elite,” in the words of Lawrence Levine.¹⁴ At the end of the century, performances of opera in English translation continued to appear on the stage, if not in New York’s premiere opera houses then throughout the country in more populist theaters presented by travelling troupes. Opera’s prominent, wealthy attendees distract from the significance of an immigrant attendance, particularly among Italians and Germans, who vigorously supported the repertoire and singers from their homelands. While the average American around the turn of the century may not have regularly attended live opera at the theater, a general familiarity with the repertoire remained part of the shared cultural consciousness, as evidenced by the popularity of opera parodies and burlesques in addition to opera references in popular songs.¹⁵ Transcriptions of opera excerpts

¹² Kara Anne Gardner, “‘Living by the Ladies’ Smiles’: The Feminization of American Music and the Modernist Reaction” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1999), 17–18.

¹³ *New York Times*, 17 July 1883.

¹⁴ Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 86. In his effort to prove his “sacralization” theory, however, Levine consistently underplays the continuing role of at least a partly popular, rather than exclusively elite, audience at operas into the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

¹⁵ For example, the 1909 collection *Heart Songs*, whose selections represent the favorites of “the American people of today” (vi) and were submitted by the readers themselves, contained a small number of opera adaptations with translated English texts. Composers include Wagner, Verdi, Donizetti, Flotow, and Gounod, among others. See

regularly appeared on the programs of popular wind band or orchestral concerts. Black singers who could not perform with professional opera companies included arias in vaudeville shows.¹⁶ Newspapers and other periodicals supplied extensive coverage of opera productions and opera singers. The genre remained something that the average person at least knew about, even if he or she was no devotee.

Despite a broad base of operatic familiarity, the genre in the late nineteenth century remained practically a closed shop in terms of participation by American singers, musicians, and conductors. Impresarios hired most of these either directly from Europe or, in the case of orchestral musicians, primarily from among the immigrant population. The few American singers who made their living on the opera stage almost without exception went to Europe for training and experience before returning to the United States, much like American composers of the same generation. Henry C. Lahee, in his 1902 survey *Grand Opera in America*, explored the ramifications of these circumstances on the nation's operatic scene. In his opinion, one limit on the growth of opera in the United States was the public's insistence on private rather than institutional or governmental financing of opera. Lahee writes, "Although [Americans] have been willing to pay great prices to hear successful operas sung by successful singers, they have not subsidized opera in such a manner that new works can be brought out for trial without the risk of financial loss to individuals." This had a particularly stifling effect on any composer seeking to pursue opera writing: "There seems to be very little encouragement for the American composer to put forth his efforts upon grand opera, for there is practically no hope of his work

Joe Mitchell Chapple, ed., *Heart Songs: Dear to the American People* (Boston: Chapple Publishing Co., 1909). For a study of opera references in popular songs, see Larry Hamberlin, *Tin Pan Opera: Operatic Novelty Songs in the Ragtime Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁶ For biographies and source readings on numerous Black singers from this period, see Darryl Glenn Nettles, *African American Concert Singers Before 1950* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003).

ever being heard.”¹⁷ American singers were in a slightly better situation, but only if they already “have won recognition in the great art centers of Europe” are they “worth as much to American audiences as [are] foreign singers.”¹⁸

One enterprising organization, however, sought to provide European-quality opera training and experience right here at home. The American Opera Company, supported by philanthropist Jeannette Thurber and directed by Theodore Thomas, toured the country for two seasons (1886 and 1887) with an all-American cast of young singers performing in English, in an effort to reclaim opera as a high-art genre and rescue it from foreign domination.¹⁹ Their target audience was the broad American public, not just the wealthy elite or tradition-respecting immigrants. Thomas’s wife Rose explained his primary motivation in her published memoir: “He wanted to establish a high standard of operatic performances, in all parts of America, in the same sense that he had already established a high standard of orchestra performance.” The Thomas approach to opera would be different, for as Rose reminded readers, “he cared not at all for opera considered as a fashionable social function.”²⁰ Gone was the focus on star European divas; instead, musical and production values took center stage, as operas were realized by highly talented yet largely unknown casts of singers under Thomas’s baton. The company was

¹⁷ Henry C. Lahee, *Grand Opera in America* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1902), 311–2. Although little known today, Lahee was one of the period’s most astute observers of the nation’s operatic scene. Writing for a general readership, he also published a series of books on “famous” singers, violinists, and pianists “of today and yesterday.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 338.

¹⁹ Theodore Thomas was the obvious choice to direct the venture, for he pursued a similar with orchestras for the “reclamation” of concert music. See Horowitz, *Classical Music in America*, 32–8, 128–32, and 163–78. For a full biography of Thomas, see Ezras Schabas, *Theodore Thomas: America’s Conductor and Builder of Orchestras, 1835–1905* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989). The most complete studies of the American Opera Company’s brief history are Emanuel Rubin, “Jeannette Meyer Thurber (1850–1946): Music for a Democracy,” in *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists since 1860*, ed. Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997), 134–163 and Emanuel Rubin, “American Opera in the Gilded Age: America’s First Professional Touring Opera Company,” in *Opera and the Golden West*, 78–93.

²⁰ Rose Fay Thomas, *Memoirs of Theodore Thomas* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1911), 278.

largely successful in its aims. For example, a seven-performance visit to Los Angeles in 1887, as Catherine Parsons Smith describes, became “a grand community happening” with “at least half the town’s adult population” in attendance, demonstrating “opera’s continuing role as popular entertainment with a large public following.”²¹ The company’s repertoire was decidedly up-to-date for 1887, including Verdi’s *Aida*, Rubenstein’s *Nero* and Delibes’ *Lakmé*, premiered in 1871, 1879 and 1883 respectively.²² This L.A. success was typical of the company’s reception throughout its tour. From this Emanuel Rubin concludes, “There is no question about ... the readiness of late nineteenth-century American audiences to welcome opera enthusiastically.”²³

Yet despite the company’s success with the public, the venture was a financial debacle, resulting in bankruptcy and a complete reorganization between the first and second seasons. Efforts to become a true “National Opera Company” through federal subsidy came to nothing, and the organization completely folded by 1888. Had the company continued, there is no doubt that the next step would have been to include operas by American composers in its repertoire. A prize-winning libretto intended for this purpose had already been written.²⁴ This unrealized promise would have to wait until the next century, for in the 1880s, those with the financial means to support American opera remained unconvinced. Thomas’s 1927 biographer, Charles Edward Russell, offered this explanation:

As to the [American] Opera Company, remember that all the musical world had fixed its eyes upon this venture, mostly with skepticism. Nothing good in art could come out of America; this was the fixed belief of most foreigners, being obligingly reinforced therein by the general assent of Americans themselves. ... The scheme of “the Thurber

²¹ Catherine Parsons Smith, *Making Music in Los Angeles: Transforming the Popular* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 24.

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

²³ Rubin, “American Opera in the Gilded Age,” 88.

²⁴ Marguerite Merrington won the prize with her libretto, *Daphne*; see Rubin, “Jeanette Meyer Thurber,” 154.

schemers,” so called, was to give opera in American [i.e., English] by American singers and their crime in which Thomas was accessory was in not knowing from the beginning that this would never do in America.²⁵

As this failure demonstrates, the “readiness” that Rubin detects did not immediately lead to the flourishing of operas written by American composers. However, critics and observers at the turn of the century likewise perceived “readiness” when they examined the operatic scene. The desire for a distinctively American variety of opera was just beginning to be felt, the calls just beginning to be heard. The debate over American opera and American music in general would reach fever pitch in the early years of the twentieth century, the scene to which we shall next turn.²⁶

The Operatic Outlook in the Early Twentieth Century

Helen Kaufmann, in her 1937 history of music in America, offered an imaginative matrimonial analogy to explain the tensions between the foreign operatic repertoire and the emergent American repertoire at the beginning of the new century. In her scheme, imported opera is the bridegroom and American opera the bride. She describes the groom as “the fortune-hunting foreigner familiar to millionaire fathers of daughters” whose “predatory eye lights up at the sight of the maid who is heiress to all the wealth of a great country.” The bride “falls in love, bestows her hand, her wealth, and her talents upon him.”²⁷ Indeed, the pursuit of performance

²⁵ Charles Edward Russell, *The American Orchestra and Theodore Thomas* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1927), 167 and 185.

²⁶ For an overview of musical theater (as opposed to grand opera) during this same period, see Orly Leah Krasner, “Birth Pangs, Growing Pains and Sibling Rivalry: Musical Theatre in New York, 1900–1920,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 2nd ed., ed. William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 54–71. Parallel to the work of opera composers, Krasner explains that theater composers too “had to discard or integrate remnants of hand-me-down imported musical vocabularies into a language that embraced American vernacular idioms in song and dance” (54).

²⁷ Helen Loeb Kaufmann, *From Jehovah to Jazz: Music in America from Psalmody to the Present Day* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1937), 110.

excellence in European operatic repertoire left little room for new indigenous works. How might native opera find a place within this Eurocentric design? Kaufmann explains how the bride that is American opera struggles to break free of her husband's influence:

Presently she discovers, like many another bride, that her husband is of a decidedly dominating nature. In his insistence upon possessing her, he alienates her from her family, her friends, even her mother tongue. ... But when the first flush of passion is past and she awakens to a realization of her plight, she starts to struggle to be herself, American opera, with her own spoken and musical language.²⁸

Kaufmann's before-and-after dichotomy, however imaginative, fails to capture the paradoxical position of the emergent American opera. While Kaufmann rightly notes that native opera "struggled to be herself" and escape from the "predatory" domination of imported, European works, her analogy fails to reflect how composers in the early decades of the century also sought to create works which could fit *within* this inherited framework. Potential opera writers found themselves facing a double bind. According to public expectations, their works needed to be uniquely and distinctly American, but at the same time, they needed to hold the stage alongside the established masterpieces of the European canon. (For an exploration into the performance canon of opera companies during the early decades of the twentieth century and the critical perceptions surrounding this repertoire, see Appendix A.)

In the early years of the twentieth century, many observers recognized the significant potential of opera as a creative outlet, despite a lingering undercurrent of distrust for the form. On the positive side, opera occupied a prominent place in the nation's cultural life, not just for an elite audience but for the broader public as well. The singer David Bispham, a Wagnerian baritone and one of the first Americans to achieve international operatic fame, believed that "the average listener will, by reason of the varied background of light and color, scenery and costume,

²⁸ Ibid., 110–1.

consider opera to be more attractive than the orchestral concert.”²⁹ Herbert Antcliffe, a British observer, was thoroughly impressed by the vibrant operatic scene in the United States, especially from “a country reputed to be unmusical. ... [T]he reports which come from America suggest an operatic activity which compared with what is done in England is nothing short of magnificent.”³⁰ Walker McSpadden hints at the sheer frequency and accessibility of operatic performances in the preface to his book of opera plot synopses, noting that “a knowledge of the standard operas is as essential nowadays as a knowledge of the classics of literature.”³¹ And in 1920 Paul Kies reported, “Music truly plays a large part in modern life. ... This is particularly true of opera. The best operas are constantly produced at enormous expense and attended by ever-increasing crowds”—a growth reinforced by the proliferation of gramophone records which “are sold by the thousands.”³² The RCA Victor Company thought very highly of its contribution to the musical scene, explaining in the first edition of *The Victor Book of the Opera*, “In former years, after the close of the opera season and the annual migration of the artists to Europe, no one seemed to think much about grand opera or opera singers. The Victor, however, has changed all this, and operatic records now form a most important part of the musical life of the home.”³³ Taken in total, these cultural trends led composer Horatio Parker to conclude in 1910 that “The

²⁹ David Bispham, “Music as a Factor in National Life,” *North American Review* 175, no. 553 (December 1902): 793.

³⁰ Herbert Antcliffe, “American Music as Viewed from Afar,” *The New Music Review* 11 (October 1912): 465.

³¹ J. Walker McSpadden, *Opera Synopses: A Guide to the Plots and Characters of the Standard Operas* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1911), iii.

³² Paul P. Kies, “The Teaching of Opera Librettos,” *The English Journal* 9, no. 2 (February 1920): 71–2. Kies’s thesis is that since operatic familiarity is a requisite part of the common cultural currency, opera librettos ought to be included in high school English-class curriculum.

³³ Samuel Holland Rous, ed., *The Victor Book of the Opera*, 1st ed. (Camden, N.J.: Victor Talking Machine Co., 1912), 9. For a further discussion of the connection between sound recording technology and the popular audience for art music, see Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 56–79.

opera is just now the largest figure on our musical horizon,” while Arthur Farwell in 1911 expected that the nation’s composers were “apparently upon the dawn of a liberal operatic productivity.”³⁴ Given the new accessibility of the operatic stage for American composers in that decade, these observations seem startlingly prescient.

Offsetting this operatic potential, however, were lingering doubts about the artistic legitimacy of opera because of the genre’s perceived status as a mere social function and as an exotic import designed to entertain the rich. Echoing an older opinion that had been floating around for much of the nineteenth century, James Gibbons Huneker complained that no matter how much money New York might spend on music, “still it is not a musical city. The opera is the least sign; opera is a social function—sometimes a circus, never a temple of art.”³⁵ The focus on star singers similarly weakened the genre’s musical legitimacy. Glenn Dillard Gunn explained the situation in 1912:

The American public long since has adopted the Latin viewpoint as to opera. We are less concerned with the work to be performed than with the singers who are to assist in its presentation. To the average American opera means the “star”; and while our public welcomes novelties in the repertory, is not averse to a beautiful orchestra, an adequate chorus, a great conductor, intelligent stage management, and effective scenic settings, these things are merely incidents to the display of great voices.³⁶

Charles Henry Meltzer likewise complained of audiences who “night after night ... drink in senseless sounds at the Metropolitan” and “let foreign singers dominate the opera stage.”³⁷

Henry Lahee, meanwhile, looked forward to a time when “opera will be enjoyed for the music

³⁴ Horatio W. Parker, “Contemporary Music,” *North American Review* 191, no. 653 (April 1910): 523; and Arthur Farwell, “American Opera on American Themes: Artistic Significance of Herbert’s *Natoma* and Converse’s *Sacrifice*,” *The American Review of Reviews* 43 (1911): 446.

³⁵ James Huneker, *Old Fogey: His Musical Opinions and Grotesques* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1913), 70.

³⁶ Glenn Dillard Gunn, “Distinguished Artists Will Inaugurate Opera,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 November 1912.

³⁷ Charles Henry Meltzer, “The Coming of American Opera,” *The Forum* (January 1918): 67–8.

rather than for the excitement of hearing celebrities of worldwide reputation, or for the opportunity of exhibiting a wealth of jewelry.”³⁸

For both Deems Taylor and Daniel Gregory Mason, the greatest obstacle hindering the progress of opera was its status as an exotic import. Looking back on the early decades of the twentieth century, Taylor admitted, “We have imported opera much as we import caviar and Scotch grouse—as something rare, exotic, and expensive. The fact that it has been a wholly alien product has only added to its fascination.”³⁹ Mason supplemented exoticism with a second of the genre’s perceived faults—its hybrid, collaborative nature: “Opera, especially, has always been to us an exotic, and [it] seems likely always to remain so. Perhaps that will be no great misfortune, since of all forms of music opera is the most adulterated with non musical-elements, and the least satisfactory.”⁴⁰ Or, as Charles O’Connell suggested in 1936, perhaps the form simply went against the American temperament:

While on one side there is a vociferous group demanding that native talent be exploited in the creative field as well as in the sphere of interpretation, there is another group, quietly and stubbornly satisfied with the standard operatic repertoire, and stubbornly uninterested in anything new. Furthermore, the hybrid art that we call opera cannot be said to be *en rapport* with the spirit of American life, and while we can understand it as a manifestation of life in foreign countries, we find it difficult to accept as a product of our own habit of thought and living.⁴¹

Curiously, one key factor is only implied rather than explicitly acknowledged in these commentaries—the role of the immigrant population in supporting the genre. Surely, this fact

³⁸ Lahee, *Grand Opera in America*, 339. These, in fact, are the closing words of Lahee’s entire book!

³⁹ Taylor, *Of Men and Music*, 203–4.

⁴⁰ Daniel Gregory Mason, *Tune In, America: A Study of Our Coming Musical Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), 9.

⁴¹ Charles O’Connell, ed., *The Victor Book of the Opera*, 9th ed. (Camden, N.J.: RCA Manufacturing Company, 1936), 289.

reinforced the perceived exoticism of the undertaking while at the same time making opera going seem even further removed from “the spirit of American life.”

Some opera composers too acknowledged feelings of distrust in the genre. Henry Hadley, for instance, was quick to stress that he was not primarily an opera composer, even though, as he explained to an interviewer, he was “always on the lookout for a text that vibrates with dramatic situations. An opera is so colorful; I like to write its music. Its music, however, is not and cannot be music in its purest form.”⁴² Frederick Converse wanted to redirect the entire institution in a more highbrow, and therefore artistically legitimate, direction, as he explained in a 1912 speech:

Let us, then, consider our opera house in a more serious light than as merely a place of amusement; let us think of it as a potential force for the highest self expression in our midst; let us not only realize what it is at present, but let us dream of what it may become.⁴³

The key word here is “dream,” for Converse’s socially uplifting, high-art conception of opera was a far cry from reality—he delivered these comments as his hometown Boston Opera Company faced insurmountable financial difficulties. The wealthy, social elite that Converse thought detracted from the form’s value as art were the only thing that kept many opera companies afloat, much as they do today.

Perhaps the severest attack against America’s operatic system comes from Thomas Whitney Surette, a prominent music educator, writer, and sometime composer. Although an opera lover himself, Surette was horrified at how the form had been co-opted as an outlet for the display of wealth: “Opera is controlled by a few rich men who think it a part of the life of a great city that there should be an opera house with a fine orchestra, finest scenery, and the greatest

⁴² Quoted in Herbert R. Boardman, *Henry Hadley: Ambassador of Harmony* (Atlanta, Ga.: Banner Press, 1932), 75.

⁴³ Quoted in Robert J. Garofalo, *Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871–1940): His Life and Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 220.

singers obtainable. It does not exist for the good of the whole city, but rather for those of plethoric purses.”⁴⁴ Like many another critic, Surette complained of the genre’s “exotic atmosphere in which the normal person finds difficulty in breathing, and which often turns the opera singer in to a strange specimen of the *genus* man or woman.” These flaws were the result of “an uncritical public pleased by a gorgeous spectacle or entertained by fine singing” who approached opera merely as “a slightly illicit aesthetic adventure.”⁴⁵ Surette, like Converse, envisioned that all this might change. He hoped that someday the public would “go to hear opera as we go to a symphony concert, or to an art museum—to satisfy our love of beauty, and quicken our imagination by contact with beautiful objects” for only “then would opera become a fine human institution, then would it take its place among the noble dreams of humanity.”⁴⁶

Yet before opera could aim for that exalted status in the United States, American institutions first had to prove that they could compete on an even playing field with their European counterparts. This urge arose in large part out of that uniquely American sense of national exceptionalism, as Cora Lyman recognized in 1914:

We Americans are ambitious to be musical, largely because we do not want other nations to beat us in any way. So we work zealously to establish symphony orchestras and local opera; ...we bribe all the great artists away from Europe in the height of the season and send them home with their pockets full, to proclaim loudly that America is now really a greater musical nation than Italy or Germany.⁴⁷

This need to best Europe, especially when it comes to opera, resulted in the wholesale adoption of European repertoire, artists and practices within the nation’s preeminent performance venues. In New York especially, this assumption of Old-World customs, including the performance of

⁴⁴ Thomas Whitney Surette, “The Opera,” *Atlantic Monthly* 117 (April 1916): 475.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 475, 466 and 476.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 475–6.

⁴⁷ Cora Lyman, “Our Most Belated Art,” *The Forum* (March 1914): 442.

opera in the original language, resulted in a fragmentation of the city's audience for opera. Instead of one unified, supportive public, immigrants primarily patronized the operas of their homelands. Johanna Gadski, a German soprano employed at the Met, offered this observation on the New York scene in 1910:

Here the population is so cosmopolitan, you have enough French people to support the French opera and enough Germans to support the Wagner. The difference in nationality in the house on different nights is most marked I think. And the class of Americans who attend opera regardless of the language are themselves cosmopolitans who are as fluent with one language as another.⁴⁸

The roots of so many of the criticisms encountered above are embedded in Gadski's remarks. Again, an ethnically variable audience would certainly heighten the public's perception of the genre as an exotic import. Moreover, if only a certain "class of Americans" could ever really feel at home in the opera house, then clearly opera was more of a social affair than a musical or artistic experience.

More than any other single event, the world premiere of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* by the Metropolitan Opera on 10 December 1910 confirmed America's ability to contribute to the international scene.⁴⁹ As John C. Freund observed in *Musical America* only six days after the premiere:

There is a subconscious feeling that this night marks an epoch in American life, for this night will give New York, and through her, the United States, a place by the side of Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna and Milan as a center of music and art, and perhaps, in the not distant future lead the way so that the great composers will learn to make their first

⁴⁸ Quoted in an interview from "Should Grand Opera Be Sung in English? How the Question is Viewed Professionally and the Practical Test That Will Soon Be Given to It," *New York Times*, 6 February 1910.

⁴⁹ Earlier in the century, the Metropolitan's 1903 U.S. premiere of *Parsifal*—the work's first staged appearance outside of Bayreuth and a direct violation of Cosima Wagner's wishes—played a similarly significant role in proving the nation's operatic clout. See Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 259–66.

appeal for a verdict here, and so show the world that we have taken the lead in presenting the works of the masters, as other great cities of the world have done hitherto.⁵⁰

Note, however, that American creators are nowhere on Freund's radar. He could only imagine that the "great composers" of the rest of the world might seek out a premiere "verdict" here, not that native composers ever would. Thus opera became, in Joseph Horowitz's pithy phrase, "a curatorial enterprise, incurably Eurocentric."⁵¹

Alongside these cultural trends, the institutional infrastructure for opera performance underwent a significant shift during the early decades of the century. When Sonneck expressed his concerns in 1905, New York's Metropolitan was indeed the nation's only permanent opera venue capable of achieving international performance standards.⁵² Only touring companies produced opera in other parts of the country. A company might organize a "season" in a given city during a residency of several days, weeks or even months. Through this system, most of the country's major cities were exposed to at least some portion of the standard repertoire. Lacking, however, were resident companies that could compete with the Met or that could present operas outside of New York on a more permanent basis. The Met had faced no regular competition since the then three-year-old company forced the failing Academy of Music to close in 1886 after a period of heated rivalry.⁵³ The first challenger of the new century was the brainchild of impresario Oscar Hammerstein, who in 1906 founded the Manhattan Opera Company as what he

⁵⁰ John C. Freund, "First Production of Puccini's Opera," *Musical America* 13, no. 6 (17 December 1910): 1; quoted in Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini & the Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 110–1.

⁵¹ Horowitz, *Classical Music in America*, 146.

⁵² For a look at the Met's early history, see Paul E. Eisler, *The Metropolitan Opera: The First Twenty-Five Years, 1883-1908* (Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.: North River Press, 1984) and Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1966: A Candid History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966).

⁵³ See John Fredrick Cone, *First Rival of the Metropolitan Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

intended to be a more modern alternative to the Met.⁵⁴ Boston soon established its own resident company in 1909, overcoming an inherently puritanical dislike of the theater, under the leadership of Henry Russell and the financial support of Eben D. Jordan.⁵⁵ Both of these ventures were short lived. The Boston Opera company folded under financial pressure in 1915, following a disastrously expensive Paris tour the previous year. The Met bought out Hammerstein in 1910 and contractually prevented him from presenting opera in New York City for a period of ten years, a ban that he would not outlive. The company was quickly reorganized in Chicago—with the same conductor and artists, but without Hammerstein—finding a new home in time for the start of the fall season. As the Chicago Opera Company, this organization continued to thrive until the Great Depression when it finally closed in 1932.⁵⁶ Although none of these organizations (with the exception of the Met) still exist today, this period marks the beginning of what remains today’s norm: major American cities each host their own permanent, resident opera company, rather than depending on irregular visits from touring opera troupes.

Coupled with the formation of new permanent opera companies was a shift in the financial model of production. In the earlier system, as Paul DiMaggio explains, “patrons controlled the houses but contracted with commercial impresarios to hire the talent and produce the shows.” The stockholders in an opera company actually only “provided a stage, roof, and seats. Commercial entrepreneurs provided the operas. When profits failed to materialize, the opera house backers were pressed to increase their guarantees; when profits were high, the

⁵⁴ See John Fredrick Cone, *Oscar Hammerstein’s Manhattan Opera Company* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966).

⁵⁵ See Quaintance Eaton, *The Boston Opera Company* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1965). Composer Frederick Converse was one of the organization’s vice presidents.

⁵⁶ See Robert C. Marsh and Norman Pellegrini, *150 Years of Opera in Chicago* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006) and Ronald L. Davis, *Opera in Chicago* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966).

impresarios paid the proprietors.”⁵⁷ Such was the case at the Met until 1908. In this model, impresarios would obviously choose to present only those works most likely to turn a profit, thus allowing little room to gamble on an untried work by an American composer. In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, opera production shifted “to the high-culture model of integrated presentation and production under the authority of wealthy trustees.”⁵⁸ Now a hired artistic director would plan a season and employ singers, much like an impresario but without the risk of personal financial loss assumed in the earlier model, since losses were now subsidized by wealthy backers. This economic change, more than any other single factor, made feasible the staging of American works, as is clearly reflected in the performance statistics from the 1910s and beyond.

Calls for American Opera

Commentators presented a nearly united front when it came to the call for a national style of American opera. They believed that the country’s operatic scene was sufficiently advanced and ready to welcome the products of native composers and librettists. While the anonymous 1883 *New York Times* writer seemed disappointed with the general lack of performances of music by native composers, he still found comfort in “the thought that, when the American composer does appear, he will find a great people, filled with a genuine love for all that is noble in music, ready to receive and appreciate him.”⁵⁹ Lawrence Gilman, writing nearly three decades later, sensed a complementary readiness among the nation’s producers, managers, and boards of

⁵⁷ Paul J. DiMaggio, “Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The Extension of the High-Culture Model to the Theatre, Opera and the Dance,” PONPO Working Paper No. 160, (Yale University: Program on Non-Profit Organizations, Institution for Social and Policy Studies, 1991), 15 and 19–20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁹ *New York Times*, 17 July 1883.

directors: “As for the generous and patriotic men who control the destinies of our opera-houses, they have opened wide the doors and there are hospitable words upon their lips.” Once again, the potential opera creators were the ones missing from the picture: “But where are the composers who shall justify their enthusiasm and their faith?”⁶⁰ Despite the supposedly “missing” composers, Gilman remained a staunch advocate of American opera, as he explained in 1914:

Here is a matter that invites a hopeful attitude on the part of the music publicist. Of course there is not the slightest question that the production of operas by native composers set to texts in the vernacular is a highly desirable thing. No one who is interested in the growth of a native musical art but would rejoice to see operas by American composers, sung in the vernacular, established in the regular repertoire.⁶¹

Composers naturally did not seem to think *they* were missing, and, in fact, they closely parallel Gilman’s “hopeful attitude” in their own comments. Frederick Converse, for one, noted in a diary entry his belief that “We are bound to write operas in America, just as we have built up great commercial enterprises—they can’t stop us.”⁶² For Converse, the concept of American exceptionalism apparently extended into the creative realm as well. Reginald DeKoven likewise aligned his hopes with the genre of opera, and not with the lighter comic opera or operetta upon which he had built his career. Like Converse, DeKoven implies that progress in opera is bound up with the development of the nation as a whole:

For if today 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

⁶⁰ Lawrence Gilman, “Opera in English,” *The North American Review* 193 (1911): 751. Gilman here is specifically addressing recent American scores including Converse’s *The Sacrifice* and Herbert’s *Natoma*, neither of which apparently fully “justified” the “enthusiasm” leading up to their premieres, in his opinion. Perhaps the later efforts by Moore, Hadley and Cadman answer Gilman’s query about where the composers are.

⁶¹ Lawrence Gilman, “The Question of Opera in English,” in *Nature in Music; and Other Studies in the Tone-Poetry of Today* (New York: John Lane Company, 1914), 148.

⁶² Diary entry dated 19 March 1910, quoted in Garofalo, *Frederick Shepherd Converse*, 39.

largely operatic to assure to himself artistic progress and development, and to secure for his art the needed wider national recognition, significance, and importance.⁶³

Deems Taylor, writing in the 1930s, still thought it an “opportune” time to pursue opera writing; but for him, the genre’s appeal was commercial rather than nationalist. As he saw it, “there is money to be made out of opera. A successful opera composer ... could become, at worst, comfortably well off, and at best, wealthy on his royalties from performances. The composers who have made fortunes out of music have all been composers of opera.”⁶⁴ While not as overtly patriotic as the sentiments of Converse or DeKoven, Taylor’s profit motivation is, at its core, just as American.⁶⁵

Despite the potential which both composers and critics recognized, Gilman’s question—where are the composers?—was indeed perceived to be the germane one. Commentary from throughout the early decades of the twentieth century suggests that opera was somehow trapped in a perpetual state of “not yet.” Although there was widespread agreement that the country was ready and waiting for a distinctive, national school and despite the increasing operatic productivity, the works that composers produced never seemed to measure up to the initial expectations, leaving critics to conclude that *the* American opera was still somewhere in the future. Henry Lahee, writing in 1901, thought it “a long way off—perhaps about the middle of

⁶³ Reginald DeKoven, “Opera in English: Its Relation to the American Composer and Singer,” *The Century Magazine* 87 (March 1914): 677.

⁶⁴ Taylor, *Of Men and Music*, 156.

⁶⁵ Not everyone was convinced that composing operas could be financially rewarding in the United States. Charles Henry Meltzer, one of the scene’s most pessimistic observers, seemed especially worried: “We might wait centuries for an American school of opera which depended for its creation on the support it would receive at the Metropolitan and the Chicago Opera House. The few dollars which result from the production of even a half success by an American composer at those theaters would hardly keep him in food for more than a year or so. He could not live on the delight of hearing his opera given from time to time at one of those great but grudging theaters. He needs outlets here and there in many houses. He needs royalties which are not crusts of bread.” Meltzer’s unlikely dream was for “some generous millionaire [to] endow one dignified parent theater for performances of original operas by Americans.” See Meltzer, “The Coming of American Opera,” 64 and 67.

this century.”⁶⁶ By 1911, Clarence E. Le Massena, perhaps even more pessimistic than Lahee, believed that “Probably we shall never witness the establishment of American opera in our day and generation. We may [only] live to see its inception.”⁶⁷ That same year, following the premieres of Converse’s *The Sacrifice* and Herbert’s *Natoma*, an obviously disappointed writer for *Current Literature* complained that “the great American opera ... is not here yet” and that “the real American opera has not yet arrived.”⁶⁸ By 1918, Herbert F. Small was echoing the same call: “American Opera is not yet, but ... the time is ripe for it, and we must have it.”⁶⁹ As late as 1927, William Saunders worried that, despite the “decided urge in the United States towards the creation of a distinctively national type of opera ... nothing of a highly outstanding character has yet emerged.” He still wondered if “it is too early yet [to expect] a genuine national genius” who could “found a national system of opera.”⁷⁰ Even Edward Hipsher, arguably the most committed advocate for the new American repertoire, conceded, “‘The Great American Opera’ is yet to be written.”⁷¹

How then can we reconcile the ever-increasing number of American operas being written and performed across this almost thirty-year time span with the near consensus that American opera was in fact “not yet” a reality? In part, this stems from the unrealistic expectations of the

⁶⁶ Lahee, *Grand Opera in America*, 339.

⁶⁷ Quoted in “The Outlook for American Opera,” *Current Literature* 50 (1911): 654. He neglects to explain what he means by either “establishment” or “inception.”

⁶⁸ “The Musical Value of Victor Herbert’s *Natoma*,” *Current Literature* 50 (1911): 430 and 431. This same year, another unnamed writer offered this consolation to the proponents of American opera: “If, as many believe, the great American novel has not yet been written, it is hardly to be wondered at that in the realm of operatic composition, which is so much younger an art than the writing of fiction, so little that is worthwhile has been done in this country.” See “An American Opera in Boston,” *The Independent* 70 (30 March 1911): 658.

⁶⁹ Herbert F. Small, “On Opera,” *Musical Quarterly* 4 (1918): 37.

⁷⁰ William Saunders, “National Opera, Comparatively Considered,” *Musical Quarterly* 13 (January 1927): 82.

⁷¹ Edward Ellsworth Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1927), 448.

critics, audiences and opera companies. Everyone was awaiting that one towering masterwork, which, once and for all, would establish a uniquely national idiom and would immediately earn a place in the international repertoire. (Other genres, including the novel and the symphony, suffered from a similarly endless search for “the great” American exemplar.) This created a situation in which the anticipation for any new American opera premiere was so overwhelming that the burden of expectations was virtually impossible to meet. Henry Krehbiel, for instance, at the first performance of *Natoma* in Philadelphia realized that it “was obviously looked upon as a momentous event upon which hung everlasting things.”⁷² When a new opera instead turned out to be something more closely related to the European tradition, well-made but not a masterpiece—or worse, just plain mediocre—the only possible optimistic conclusion for supportive critics was “not yet.”

Two significant events during the 1910s at least made the operatic stage more easily accessible. The first of these was the hiring of Giulio Gatti-Casazza to be the general manager of the Metropolitan Opera in New York. He shared control of the house with Andreas Dippel from 1908 to 1910 but then continued as sole manager and artistic director until 1935. It was Gatti-Casazza’s deeply held belief that the nation’s preeminent opera house had a responsibility to provide opportunities for American composers and performers, a topic that recurs throughout his autobiography. He explains:

[I]t was from the beginning my intention and my manifest duty to do my utmost for American artists and American art. ... My management always understood the complete importance of doing all that was possible, in the first lyric theater of America, in favor of

⁷² Henry Edward Krehbiel, *More Chapters of Opera; being Historical and Critical Observations and Records Concerning the Lyric Drama in New York from 1908 to 1918* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), 227. This issue is treated in greater detail at the end of chapter two.

the American elements, whether it was a question of composers, artists, or any other aspect of it.⁷³

Later in the book he continues, “It seemed to me that one of the inescapable obligations of the great American lyric theater was to foster and promote the development of American opera. No national school of opera has ever developed without the incentive of performances.”⁷⁴ Hence, under Gatti-Casazza’s tenure, American opera first appeared on the Met’s stage in 1910.⁷⁵ Of the six composers discussed here, Converse, Hadley, and Cadman all directly benefitted from this policy. With the Met taking the lead, other opera companies grew more likely to consider staging new American works, thus launching premieres across the country.

Charles Cadman, in an article contemporary with the premiere of his *Shanewis*, recognized the significant role that the Met could potentially play if they continued to support native works:

American opera has had many bumps thus far, and practically every opera has been shelved, but if the Metropolitan management can manage to “keep the home fires burning” for a while, and give the American composer a chance, I think native opera ought to grow out of its swaddling clothes—into short dresses (or trousers) at least!⁷⁶

Cadman could not be sure that the Met’s support would continue. None of the American operas staged before *Shanewis* were successful enough to remain in the company’s repertoire beyond their initial run. (*Shanewis* was the first to appear in two consecutive seasons.) As the editor’s

⁷³ Giulio Gatti-Casazza, *Memories of the Opera*, trans. and ed. Howard Taubman (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 21–2.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 237. Surely James Glass is wrong to belittle Gatti-Casazza’s consistent support as “a public relations gesture ... to placate the critics who frequently accused him of overemphasizing the Italian repertoire.” See James William Glass, “American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910–1920” (M.M. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1971), 41.

⁷⁵ This was *The Pipe of Desire*, Frederick Converse’s first opera, which had premiered in Boston five years earlier. For a concise overview of the American operas produced during Gatti-Casazza’s tenure, see Elise K. Kirk, *American Opera* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 160–83. A list of works appears on page 166. Also see “Gatti-Casazza Dies at 71 in Homeland,” *New York Times*, 3 September 1940.

⁷⁶ Charles Wakefield Cadman, “Some Confessions about *Shanewis*,” *The Violinist* 23 (1918): 355–6.

note preceding Cadman's article reminded readers, "Getting into the Metropolitan with American opera is getting into the world's present musical stronghold."⁷⁷ Nevertheless, as Gatti-Casazza's tenure wore on, the support of native works did indeed continue, abetted by the urging of critics like Olin Downes. He recognized, "If the Metropolitan, by stimulating native talent, can add a good opera in the native tongue to its repertory, it will have materially increased its prestige and its usefulness. If it cannot do so at preset, it must keep on seeking until it finds."⁷⁸ Indeed, by the end of the Gatti-Casazza era at the Met, the company had produced fourteen American operas, in addition to premiering several ballets with scores by American composers and hosting other touring productions of American works, including Herbert's *Natoma*.⁷⁹

Looking back on these years from the vantage point of 1932, critic William Saunders saw that in 1910 "commenced what may, so far as opera is concerned, be regarded as the age of enlightenment." Even Saunders, however, betrays a lingering sense of "not yet":

The effect of this is only now beginning to be felt, but the immediate results were decidedly happy, as the minds of many of the ablest of America's composers were gradually turned into what may be called operatic channels, and steady progress has since been made towards what must, sooner or later, emerge as a truly American national opera.⁸⁰

Like earlier critics, he is convinced that only "sooner or later" will American opera possess a distinctively national voice. He believes "that it will eventually appear ... but it can hardly be expected to arrive for another two or three generations at least."⁸¹ However, Saunders is virtually

⁷⁷ Ibid., 353.

⁷⁸ Olin Downes, "A Twelfth 'American Opera,'" *New York Times*, 17 October 1926.

⁷⁹ For an additional study of American opera during Gatti-Casazza's reign, see Carolyn Guzski, "American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910–1935: A Contextual History and Critical Survey of Selected Works" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2001).

⁸⁰ William Saunders, "The American Opera: Has It Arrived?" *Music and Letters* 13 (1932): 149.

⁸¹ Ibid., 152.

alone in detecting the threads of consistency that run throughout the operas premiered during these years. He takes other critics to task for overlooking their primary unifying characteristic—the topic that not coincidentally is the principal focus of this dissertation: “It was clearly obvious to all who had taken the least trouble to study the scores and tendencies of these works, that there was, from beginning to end, a distinct and conscious urge towards the formation and evolution of a pronounced and distinctive American idiom.”⁸² In Saunders’s view, a “conscious urge” is the key factor, even if the results do not fully realize that goal. The simple presence of this consistent tendency can indeed unite the works from this period into a nascent school of American opera. This “urge” is of course not unique to this genre, for despite my single-track focus here, much of this evidence applies to the Americanist movement as a whole and not just to opera composers.

The second potential advantage for American opera came toward the end of the decade, with the nation’s entry into World War I and the accompanying spread of an anti-German bias.⁸³ In the opera world, this led to the dismissal of German artists from the rosters of opera companies and to what was essentially a boycott of the German repertoire.⁸⁴ Critics at the time realized that this situation would present both composers and vocalists with additional opportunities. An editor’s note in *The Forum* explained to readers that the anti-German ban arose

⁸² Ibid., 150

⁸³ For additional studies of the impact of World War I on the nation’s musical scene, see Barbara Tischler, “WWI and the Challenge of 100% Americanism,” in *An American Music: The Search for an American Musical Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 68–91; and Barbara Tischler “One Hundred Percent Americanism and Music in Boston during World War I,” *American Music* 4 (1986): 164–76.

⁸⁴ At the Met, living composers like Humperdinck or Richard Strauss shouldered the brunt of the impact. *Hänsel und Gretel* was pulled from the repertoire after 1916 and did not reappear until 1927. Likewise, *Der Rosenkavalier* remained unperformed from January 1917 until November 1922. No Wagner was staged from the end of the 1917 spring season until a new production of *Parsifal* (in English) opened in February 1920. Even *Fidelio* fell under the cloud of suspicion, with a gap from between January 1917 to January 1927. Data compiled from the “MetOpera Database,” accessible online at <<http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm>>; also see Horowitz, *Wagner Nights*, 295–301 and John Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater: New York City, 1840–1940* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 473–5.

“not because we object in principle to German music, but because just now we do not like the thought of affording comfort to our unrelenting foe.” This writer hoped that “the German loss may mean a gain to our own art. Already we hear much of American opera.”⁸⁵ Even those observers sympathetic to the German musicians and composers who suddenly found themselves shut out from performing opportunities realized the potential opportunity:

[T]here is one comfort to be drawn from the situation, namely, the possible encouragement of native American musical art. Already American singers are being substituted for foreigners in many places, and there is a remarkable interest in American compositions even on the part of foreign-born managers and conductors.⁸⁶

Not only did new opportunities arise in the United States, but the disruption of the European operatic scene presented American composers with an additional opening. In late 1917, Frederic Dean offered this description of the situation:

The struggle on the other side of the water has sewn up the operatic output and closed the operatic schools; and they who would entice the hearers of music in America must of necessity look about them *here* for the best available substitutes for the former operatic menus offered. In their search they have evidently found more than they were looking for; for here be not only operas—and good ones—but those who can interpret these operas. Is it possible that the long-expected American School of Music is to become a fact?⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Editor’s note preceding Meltzer, “The Coming of American Opera,” 61.

⁸⁶ “The War Plays Havoc with Teuton Music and Musicians,” *Current Opinion* 64, no. 2 (February 1918): 104. Yet again, Meltzer plays the contrarian, worrying that the foreign-born managers of the Chicago and Metropolitan Operas “cannot be expected to feel deeply pained by the anomalies of the existing system here. To Mr. Gatti-Casazza ... the English idiom and the music of Americans maybe seem equally barbarous.” (Meltzer, “The Coming of American Opera,” 64.)

⁸⁷ Frederic Dean, “The Opera—By, For and With Americans,” *The Bookman* 46 (November 1917): 266. Not all commentators were quite as sympathetic with the anti-foreign thrust of the American opera movement during the First World War. B. M. Steigman, for instance, writing during the following decade, recorded this sarcastic observation: “When we marshaled our forces against Germany, the boosters of our native opera saw their great opportunity. They discovered that Wagner was a Hun, and that his dramas presented love scenes that were passionate and un-American; that his music thenceforth was a source of anguish to our properly nurtured ears. For three years Wagner was held at bay by our stout-hearted defenders against a possible invasion of Teutonic clefs and staves.” B. M. Steigman, “The Great American Opera,” *Music and Letters* 6 (1925): 365.

Of the six operas under discussion here, Cadman's *Shanewis* does indeed fall into Dean's category of "the best available substitutes," hence its unique two-season run at the Met.⁸⁸ Henry Hadley too reaped the benefits of these new operatic outlets: 1917–1918 saw the premieres of two operas, *Azora* and *Bianca*, in addition to the Met's acceptance of *Cleopatra's Night* for a 1920 premiere.⁸⁹ The unspoken goal was that some American works might find a home in European houses, filling the void left behind by the "sewn up operatic output" and "closed operatic schools." Surely, Cadman was not alone in feeling disappointment when this hope ultimately went unrealized:

At the time of the last World War there was a patriotic revival during which people suddenly became conscious of the American composer and wanted to hear more of his music. People who formerly had ignored him, were now anxious to court him. Many of these, however, promptly forgot him after the war was over and returned to praising exclusively the music of foreigners.⁹⁰

Yet even if composers like Cadman and others of his generation felt that they were "promptly forgotten," the debate on American music in which they participated played a fundamental role in shaping the style of their operas and in defining the nation's musical scene for years to come.

The American Music Debate

While the ongoing debate over what character and style "American music" should take is well-trod scholarly terrain, it is worth re-examining the primary source evidence, especially some

⁸⁸ Carolyn Guzski, however, has convincingly argued that the Met did not significantly alter their repertoire to include a greater proportion of American works during the World War I years. With the exception of the German repertoire, Gatti-Casazza continued a consistently multi-national and cosmopolitan approach to programming and casting throughout his tenure. Cadman's work was one of only five new American operas premiered at the Met between 1917 and 1920, and most of these were brief, multi-bill scores. See Guzski, "American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910–1935," 180–6.

⁸⁹ See John C. Canfield, "Henry Kimball Hadley: His Life and Works (1871–1937)" (Ed.D. diss., Florida State University, 1960), 141.

⁹⁰ Charles Cadman, "Opportunities for the American Composer," *The Etude* 61 (November 1943): 748.

less familiar sources, with an eye towards how it affected opera composition in the early twentieth century.⁹¹ As with the narrower debate over American opera, critics and other commentators agreed that achieving a distinctively American musical style was of course desirable, but the opinions regarding when and how such a style might be achieved ranged wildly. A real sense of urgency accompanied this debate, as Cora Lyman observed in 1914:

[T]here seems to be a kind of haunting fear among musicians that unless we “do something quick” in the way of instituting prize composing contests, unearthing old folk songs and conjuring up typically American subjects, our opportunity for creating a really national music will soon have passed away.⁹²

Lyman, and other pessimists like her, seem only to want to complain about all the factors preventing or delaying the emergence of an American style. Chief among them was the perception that a national style could not emerge until full assimilation of the racially and ethnically diverse population was complete. Herbert Small, writing specifically about American opera in 1918, suggested that a “national idiom” was “still in the Melting Pot. We seem to catch new accents in the simmering, but they are as yet too ill-defined for prophecy, even.”⁹³ Henry Gilbert had expressed similar ideas in the preceding years. In a 1915 article, he suggested that “the greatest reason” there was no national style “is that we have hardly as yet developed an American race. The population of America is, as everyone recognizes, a general hodge-podge of almost all conceivable racial elements [which] are not as yet amalgamated.”⁹⁴ Writing again two

⁹¹ For general studies of the emergence of a distinctly American musical style, see Barbara L. Tischler, *An American Music: The Search for an American Musical Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Alan Howard Levy, *Musical Nationalism: American Composers’ Search for Identity* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983); and Julie Schnepel, “The Critical Pursuit of the Great American Symphony, 1893–1950” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1995). Also see Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 293–386, 495–523, and 580–96; and Horowitz, *Classical Music in America*, 94–117 and 211–62.

⁹² Cora Lyman, “Our Most Belated Art,” 435.

⁹³ Small, “On Opera,” 48.

⁹⁴ Henry F. Gilbert, “The American Composer,” *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1915): 170.

years later, his pessimism had apparently hardened: “the real American music shall eventually arise. But this is no imminent thing. I am looking now far into the future—say one or two hundred years.”⁹⁵ The proponents of this camp believed, as William Saunders put it, “Until there exists a distinctively consolidated native American population, there can be evolved a purely American school neither of literature nor of opera.”⁹⁶

The ramifications of this point of view were particularly problematic for potential opera composers. They had to push aside the assumption that what they were trying to accomplish—creating a distinctively American work for the lyric stage—could not yet possibly be achieved. Furthermore, they were aiming for performances in venues where immigrant populations played a significant role. The opera companies themselves presented works from across Europe that would have appealed in particular to the ethnic group from any given opera’s country of origin. Thus European repertoire works had a built in audience base—support that was by no means automatic for the staging of new American works. Reginald DeKoven took an especially dim, if typically verbose, view of the situation:

Until we shall finally and once for all have done away with the hyphenated nationalities, and the consequently divided national feeling, which still exert an important influence on our musical life, we cannot expect to have a national feeling which in expression shall be distinctively American and recognizable as such.⁹⁷

Given this outlook and the nation’s continuing influx of immigrants (thus delaying “melting pot” assimilation), one can see how commentators might project the arrival of an American idiom far into the future.

⁹⁵ Henry F. Gilbert, “Folk-Music in Art-Music: A Discussion and a Theory,” *Musical Quarterly* 3 (1917): 599.

⁹⁶ Saunders, “The American Opera,” 152.

⁹⁷ Reginald DeKoven, “Nationalism in Music,” *The North American Review* 189 (March 1909): 390.

The traditionally American focus on commercial rather than artistic pursuits was perceived as another impediment to the development of a national music. Conductor Theodore Thomas found fault with “the habits of the people. The average American is so entirely absorbed in his work that when he goes out in the evening he looks for relaxation in some kind of amusement which makes little or no demand upon his intellect, and he has no difficulty in finding it.”⁹⁸ John Philip Sousa, too, despaired of “the vast number of other amusements which the American people possess and enjoy” instead of music. Sousa names baseball, the automobile, Sunday newspapers and magazines in particular. His primary concern, however, is for “the strenuous and commercial American who hears his *Tristan und Isolde* with half his mind set upon the problem of how he is going to squeeze a sea bath, a roller-coaster ride, a moving-picture show, and ... dinner into the next hour.”⁹⁹ For those Americans who did attend concerts, Walter Spalding still disapproved of the audience’s comfortably passive role:

The conception of being musical in the mind of the average American is to attend so many concerts and operatic performances each year.... There is no hope of a nation becoming truly musical until the natural and creative process has been at work; it might as well try to become a race of athletes by watching others at their sports.¹⁰⁰

Despite these many distractions, Sousa, at least, thought that opera might hold the greatest popular potential for the American composer. In his view, “The people are fond of dramatic music because they are fond of the pictorial in music ... and like to associate the stories with the music. They love color, movement, and lights.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Thomas, “Musical Possibilities in America,” in *A Musical Autobiography*, 268.

⁹⁹ John Philip Sousa, “American Musical Taste,” in *The International Library of Music: Music Literature, Vol. III* (New York: The University Society, 1925), 349–50.

¹⁰⁰ Walter R. Spalding, “The War in its Relation to American Music,” *Musical Quarterly* 4 (1918): 7–8.

¹⁰¹ Sousa, “American Musical Taste,” 350.

American composers, not the least in their operas, struggled to reconcile an inherited musical style, rooted in the European tradition, with the calls for a distinctive New-World sound. Derivativeness is the focal point of this facet of the debate. Reginald DeKoven, for instance, wondered if a “lack of distinctive national musical creativeness” existed in part because most musicians, in search of training and experience, were “obliged to go elsewhere for what has been hitherto unattainable here.” He found it both “natural” and “unavoidable” that “their musical expression [would be], for the greater part, a reflection of the environment in which their artistic training has been gained.”¹⁰² Daniel Gregory Mason would later mock the older generation, of which the six composers explored here are a part, as “parrot composers” who wrote “the Music of Indigestion” for being unable to reconcile their stylistic aspirations.¹⁰³ Henry Gilbert was equally unforgiving in 1917, railing against his own contemporaries: “[W]hen now in America our composers imitate those already moribund compositions [i.e., European models] it is ... like an imitation of an imitation twice removed from the source of life.”¹⁰⁴ Just two years before, Gilbert summarized the dilemma:

The members and directors of these opera companies, the conductors of the symphony orchestras, besides the vast majority of the players, and by far most of the recitalists, are Europeans. Even when they have not been born in Europe, all their training has been European, and all their mental bias is in accordance with European musical tradition. Naturally almost all the music performed is European and thus the public is educated to an ideal of musical beauty which though great and wonderful in itself is perforce exclusive of anything which differs from it.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² DeKoven, “Nationalism in Music,” 389.

¹⁰³ Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Dilemma of American Music, and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 8 and 12.

¹⁰⁴ Gilbert, “Folk-Music in Art-Music,” 599.

¹⁰⁵ Gilbert, “The American Composer,” 171.

With the nation's entire musical scene entrenched in maintaining and preserving the European tradition, Gilbert found the odds stacked against the American composer who struggled to follow his own creative path. His judgment against those who instead sought to create works that could fit comfortably alongside the repertoire presented by the nation's orchestras and opera companies was unequivocal: "the work of the American composer ... can hardly win our highest respect" because "imitative art can never be great art."¹⁰⁶ Oscar Sonneck was more sympathetic at least, calling his contemporaries not imitators but rather "the victim of circumstances" for being "forced ... to seek his musical education abroad at an age when his mind was impressionable as wax."¹⁰⁷

Eminently more practical are those who offer suggestions for how composers might arrive at an American style rather than a litany of the factors preventing one. Yet here perhaps resides the most controversial aspect of the American music debate, one stemming from Dvořák's time in the United States during the 1890s.¹⁰⁸ Again, this material is well-documented terrain, but it is entirely worth revisiting Dvořák's own words in order to address their ramifications for opera composers and to clarify some commonly held misconceptions. His views appeared across a series interviews from 1893 printed primarily in the *New York Herald*, surrounding the composition and premiere of the composer's Ninth Symphony, "From the New World." Addressing them in sequence provides important clues to the evolution of Dvořák's

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰⁷ Oscar G. Sonneck, "A Survey of Music in America," in *Suum Cuique: Essays in Music* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1916), 138–9.

¹⁰⁸ For thorough studies of Dvořák's period in the United States, see John C. Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895* (Portland, Ore.: Amadeus Press, 1993); and Michael L. Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life* (New York: Norton, 2003).

thinking, as he was quite explicitly seeking a solution to the “problem” of locating the musical source for an American national style.

The very first of Dvořák’s proclamations appeared in print on 21 May 1893:

[T]he future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies. This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States. ... These are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them. ... Only in this way can a musician express the true sentiment of his people.¹⁰⁹

Two elements are particularly striking here—Dvořák’s use of the imperative mood and the exclusive mention of African American folk musics. In this material, the composer found “all that is needed for a great and noble school of music. ... There is nothing in the whole range of compositions that cannot be supplied with themes from this source.”¹¹⁰ A follow-up “letter to the editor” appeared just one week later, in which Dvořák seemed to backtrack from his initial assessment by instead leaving the specific musical foundation undefined:

The country is full of melody, original, sympathetic and varying in mood, color and character to suit every phase of composition. It is a rich field. America can have great and noble music of her own, growing out of the very soil and partaking of its nature—the natural voice of a free and vigorous race.¹¹¹

By late summer of 1893, Dvořák’s new symphony was well under way. He explained to an interviewer that this work was indeed “an endeavor to portray characteristics [which] are distinctively American,” but again he included no mention of his specific models. Of particular importance here, however, is the composer’s additional suggestion that “Opera is by far the best

¹⁰⁹ “Real Value of Negro Melodies,” *New York Herald*, 21 May 1893.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “Antonin Dvořák on Negro Melodies,” *New York Herald*, 28 May 1893. Note that the printed headline does not match the content of Dvořák’s letter but rather that of his interview from the previous week.

mode of expression for the undertaking, allowing as it does freedom of treatment.”¹¹² Dvořák is here speaking from experience as a composer of Czech national operas, implying that this genre, unlike the symphony with its inherent formal constraints, can be a more flexible outlet for nationalist sentiments. Indeed, material that eventually ended up in the “New World” Symphony was first intended for a projected American national opera based upon Longfellow’s *The Song of Hiawatha*.¹¹³

Only once, in an interview published the day of the “New World” Symphony premiere, does Dvořák cite both African American and Indian musics as the source of an American idiom. The composer explains that he has “been deeply interested in the national music of Negroes and the Indians. The character, the very nature of a race is contained in its national music. For that reason my attention was at once turned in the direction of these native melodies.” The imperative mood of his first pronouncement is absent now, but the goal remains explicit. Dvořák explained that his intent in the work was to “embod[y] the principles which I have already worked out in my Slavonic Dances; that is, to preserve, to translate into music, the spirit of a race as distinct in its national melodies or folk songs.”¹¹⁴ Thus, in Dvořák’s opinion, these musical materials are

¹¹² “For National Music: Dvořák, the Great Bohemian Artist, Explains His Ideas,” *Chicago Tribune*, 13 August 1893.

¹¹³ The composer himself revealed this fact in “Dvořák on his New Work,” *New York Herald*, 15 December 1893. For a Longfellow-based reading of the symphony’s scherzo, see Michael Beckerman, “The Dance of Pau-Puk-Keewis and the Song of Chibiabos: Reflections on the Scherzo of Dvořák’s Symphony ‘From the New World,’” in *Dvořák in America*, 210–27.

¹¹⁴ “Dvořák on his New Work,” *New York Herald*, 15 December 1893. He even advances the rather outrageous notion that “the music of the Negroes and of the Indians was practically identical.” For an exploration into Dvořák’s contact with actual Indian music in person, see John Clapham, “Dvořák and the American Indian,” in *Dvořák in America*, 113–122. Deborah Osman notes the “happy confluence of circumstances” whereby early ethnographers were collecting Indian musics that could provide reference materials for composers at precisely the same time as Dvořák’s suggestion for composers to use this musical source. See Deborah Margaret Osman, “The American ‘Indianist’ Composers: A Critical Review of their Sources, their Aims, and their Compositional Procedures” (D.M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1992), 97.

indeed America's "national melodies," and because they contain "the spirit of a race," they can serve as the basis of a distinct musical idiom.

Needless to say, a foreigner's suggestion that American nationalism might be based upon the musical heritage of two marginalized ethnic minorities immediately set off a firestorm of criticism. Just a week following Dvořák's initial assessment—the one requiring the use of African American music—the *New York Herald* solicited a collection of responses from leading European musicians "on the feasibility of the idea." Anton Bruckner, of all people, replied that "The basis of all music must be classical works. Negro melodies could never found the groundwork of a school of music." The American composer Arthur Bird, then resident in Berlin, was more receptive and actually preempted the second half of Dvořák's suggestion: "I have often spoken ... of the foundation of an American school of music. We spoke of Indian music, but never of Negro melodies. I think the idea worth trying."¹¹⁵ Still, the single most problematic facet of Dvořák's suggestion remained untouched: How could a definitively national music be created out of materials that were arguably more "foreign" to white, upper-class composers and audiences than was the music of the imported, European classical tradition? In answer to this question, Amy Beach, choosing her words very carefully, opined, "in order to make the best use of folk-songs of any nation as material for musical composition, the writer should be one of the people whose music he chooses, or at least brought up among them."¹¹⁶

At the root of this debate lies the issue of whether race and a national musical idiom must be in alignment. We have already encountered the "not yet" contingent's assumption that the nation's population would have to be fully assimilated before a national style could emerge.

¹¹⁵ "Dvořák's Theory of Negro Music," *New York Herald*, 28 May 1893.

¹¹⁶ Beach's comments appeared in "American Music," *Boston Herald*, 28 May 1893; quoted in Adrienne Fried Block, "Amy Beach's Music on Native American Themes," *American Music* 8 (1990): 146.

Dvořák's proposals bring this issue to the forefront, for while he did indeed identify distinct musical sources which were uniquely indigenous to the United States, they were not ones representative of the Anglo-American racial majority.¹¹⁷ Reginald DeKoven advanced the typical argument:

[T]here is in this country an almost inexhaustible fund of folk-music of the most varied kind—the Negro, Indian and Creole—on which the American composer could have drawn had he been so minded. That he has not done so more generally would seem to indicate that ... all such tunes and melodies are really exotic and in no sense indigenous. If we admit that this folk-music, characteristic and original as it is, should be taken as the proper basis of a national school of music, we must also be prepared to admit that the Indian, the Negro and the Creole are the dominant race-types of America, which is absurd.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, since DeKoven was a proponent of the idea of racial assimilation and cultural Darwinism, he consequently believed that these musical sources are “indicative only of the emotions and sentiment of alien races which have had little or nothing to do with our national upbuilding, and are now fast disappearing.”¹¹⁹ Critic Mitzi Kolisch similarly dismissed the use of Indian or African American materials as an “artificial allegiance to something which is not innate.”¹²⁰ Even Gustav Mahler seemed to recognize that these musical sources are “not any more representative of the great American people of today than are those swarthy citizens of the New World representative of all Americans.”¹²¹ To account for this racial disconnect, composer

¹¹⁷ The following discussion traces the American Music Debate ahead into the early decades of the 20th century. The primary sources cited henceforth belie Richard Aldrich's unusual 1904 assertion that the “strange controversy” surrounding Dvořák's suggestions “is now well-nigh forgotten” (Richard Aldrich, “Antonin Dvořák and His Music,” *New York Times*, 8 May 1904). For a further study of state of this debate in the 1890s, see Aaron Ziegel, “Opening ‘the Door to This Intense and Passionate Musical Life’: A Survey of *The Music of the Modern World*, 1895–1897,” (M.M. thesis: University of Cincinnati, 2004), 27–36.

¹¹⁸ DeKoven, “Nationalism in Music,” 392.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 393.

¹²⁰ Mitzi Kolisch, “Why Not an American Opera?” *The Independent* 115 (15 August 1925): 189.

¹²¹ “Mahler's Opinion of American Music,” *Musical America* 14, no. 2 (20 May 1911): 32.

John Powell, for instance, instead proposed what he called an “Anglo-Saxon Folk Music School” since then at least the musical foundation would correspond with the majority race.¹²²

Other critics worried that any musical basis rooted in indigenous materials alone would prove too limiting. Henry Finck, for instance, wondered “why it should be so generally taken for granted that a national music can be built up only on folk song. Are peasants the only nationalists?”¹²³ Daniel Gregory Mason likewise feared that a composer’s focus on indigenous materials to the exclusion of the European tradition would result in “cheating him ... [of] his birthright of wide cosmopolitan influence for a mess of purely parochial pottage.”¹²⁴ Both Finck and Mason worried what the American composer might be missing, as they witnessed their contemporaries pursuing the quest to establish a national musical idiom ever more obsessively.

Charles Wakefield Cadman offered rebuttals to both points of view. Regarding the concern that Indian musical materials are too racially removed from the Anglo composer, Cadman reminded readers that at least they have “sprung into existence on the American continent,” unlike the imported folksongs that would be the basis of Powell’s so-called Anglo-Saxon Folk Music School. Cadman offers the following comparison:

It is as much the heritage of America and Americans and of the musicians who live in America as the music of the barbaric hordes of Russia is the heritage of cultured Russians and Russian musicians. We could mention several ingenious members of the Russian school of music whose veins are without a drop of blood of those wild tribes and who

¹²² John Powell, “How America Can Develop a National Music,” *The Etude* 45 (1927): 349–50. An editor’s note preceding the article acknowledges that not everyone will agree with Powell’s contentious suggestion, but notes that “*The Etude* presents opinions upon all sides of important questions” (349). Jack Sullivan has suggested that the anti-Dvořák position arose, in part, because “Americanists felt threatened by the incursions of a prominent European espousing inferior black music in American citadels of high culture.” See Jack Sullivan, *New World Symphonies: How American Culture Changed European Music* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 163.

¹²³ Henry T. Finck, “What is American Music?” *The Etude* 24 (1906): 357.

¹²⁴ Daniel Gregory Mason, “Music in America,” in *Contemporary Composers* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 271.

have, nevertheless, caught and reflected the lilt, the life and the love of the strange and elemental peoples that make up the great Russian Empire.¹²⁵

Clearly, for Cadman, indigenoussness and geography justify this kind of musical appropriation.

Yet even he did not insist that national music must be rooted in only one foundation. He too recognized the potentially limiting effects of such exclusiveness and instead suggested an approach that draws upon a concept then much in vogue—the melting pot:

Instead of the future of American music having for its foundation any one element such as Indian, Negro, Creole, or ragtime themes, it is likely to evolve something very different. ... This is perhaps the most feasible prophecy—a blending of all the folk-song ingredients. This would also be consonant with the melting-pot symbol ... and seems quite reasonable. ... We shall perhaps find as much truth in one movement for American music as in another. All have certain valuable elements; and the sanest course is to study the principles avowed by their respective adherents, and assume an eclectic attitude.¹²⁶

Cadman's idea is far removed from the assimilation concept expressed by the “not yet” crowd.

Whereas that viewpoint, in the words of Gustav Mahler, looks for a “marvelous amalgamation of Teuton, Celt, Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Czech, Slav and Greek” that will ultimately result in one unified musical style, Cadman instead celebrates an eclecticism that can freely sample from any or all of the varied musical sounds present in the New World, indigenous or imported.¹²⁷

Cadman's melting pot is not a forge that refines and “amalgamates,” but rather one that can supply the American composer with an ever-changing blend of diverse ingredients.

As early as 1900, Rupert Hughes had expressed a similar hope, writing that when the “national spirit in American music” finally did emerge, it would be “a Cosmopolitanism made up of elements from all the world.” Like Cadman, he disapproved of “the arbitrary seizure of some musical dialect,” thus satisfying Mason's concern that composers might forsake the heritage of

¹²⁵ Charles Wakefield Cadman, “The ‘Idealization’ of Indian Music,” *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1915): 387.

¹²⁶ Charles Wakefield Cadman, “Some Thoughts on American Music,” *Canadian Journal of Music* 1 (May 1914): 5.

¹²⁷ “Mahler's Opinion of American Music,” *Musical America*, 32.

the European tradition.¹²⁸ Henry Gilbert, too, hoped that a national music would “draw elements of strength and vitality from many sources.”¹²⁹ Because of the nation’s diverse population, the American composer had at his or her disposal a broader range of musical styles and materials than any European composer could ever hope to have. Herein lies the nation’s true musical strength. For these observers, a distinctive national style was not one fixed, defined entity, but rather a product of diversity—eclectic and cosmopolitan.

The ramifications of this debate are indeed most apparent in opera, for here, more so than in the symphony or other genres of concert music, a blend of cultures and the interactions among diverse ethnicities can become the focus of the work itself. At the most basic level, a musical style which draws upon folk music will naturally find its reflection in an opera’s plot or subject matter. If a composer is keen to employ Indian themes or melodies, for instance, then the resulting opera will most certainly include Indian characters. Except for *Poia*, with its exclusively Indian roles, the remaining five operas each bring together an assortment of characters from different cultures (although no African American characters are specifically included in any of these six works). By moving beyond Dvořák’s initial recommendation, this feature reflects the eclectic cosmopolitanism for which some critics hoped. Furthermore, elements borrowed from the operas of the standard repertoire (see Appendix A) demonstrate that a national American operatic style can make room for the European heritage as well. Indeed, taken as a group, these operas seem to suggest not that any one given thing must be the source of

¹²⁸ Rupert Hughes and Arthur Elson, *American Composers: A Study of the Music of this Country, and of Its Future*, new rev. ed. (Boston: The Page Company, 1914), 23. The comment comes from Hughes’s original text authored by 1900; Arthur Elson expanded and updated the book for a second edition following Hughes’s death.

¹²⁹ Gilbert, “Folk-Music in Art-Music,” 600. He further predicted “that echoes and reflections of the racial spirits shadowed forth by all the various folk-songs will be present in the future American music.”

national opera, but rather that one should draw upon all that makes up the American experience.¹³⁰

By redirecting the focus of the American Music Debate away from the search for specific sources and towards a more inclusive whole, critics encouraged composers to concentrate instead on their obligation to write high-quality material. In the eyes of many observers, composers for too long had been bogged down in what was perceived to be a pointless quest for the “true source” of an American national style. Deems Taylor, for example, lost patience with “the search for an American musical speech, some characteristic turn of harmony, melody, or rhythm that will stamp its creator’s nationality beyond the possibility of doubt, the search that has bedeviled American music and musicians for a century.”¹³¹ Rather than requiring a “characteristic” sound ideal, some promoters of national music instead recognized that a work would be American by default—simply because of the composer’s nationality—as long as the music was of high quality. In the end, it is this opinion which seems the most pertinent and the most practical. Charles Ives, for instance, wrote that a composer’s style must be rooted in “his spiritual consciousness” so that, no matter what the materials,

...he can use [them] ... fervently, transcendently, inevitably, furiously, in his symphonies, in his operas, in his whistlings on the way to work.... With this assurance, his music will have everything it should of sincerity, nobility, strength, and beauty, no matter how it sounds; and if, with this, he is true to none but the highest of American ideals (that is, the ideas only that coincide with his spiritual consciousness), his music will be true to itself and incidentally American.¹³²

¹³⁰ These issues will receive a much more detailed treatment in chapters 3 (opera plots) and 4–5 (musical style).

¹³¹ Taylor, *Of Men and Music*, 126.

¹³² Charles Ives, *Essays Before a Sonata and Other Writings*, ed. Howard Boatwright (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 79–80. The original edition of the *Essays* was published in 1920. For a further exploration into Ives’s views on “Americanness,” see Thomas C. Owens, “Charles Ives and His American Context: Images of ‘Americanness’ in the Arts” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1999).

Ives essentially arrived at the same conclusion as Richard Aldrich already had in 1906. A composer need not necessarily write “music of a distinctively American flavor” but instead must write “music that will appeal by its beauty and strength and emotional quality to the men and women of any country who are sensitive to musical impressions.”¹³³ Indeed, “quality” and “appeal” are the key words here, for even if a composer lands upon a definitive American sound, his or her works would amount to nothing if they were not of high enough quality to appeal to a broad audience. Cadman, too, acknowledged this same objective: “[I]f any American spirit permeates their work, let it come unconsciously and not consciously.” For him, achieving a “more potent” degree of “universal appeal” was the goal. He recognized that “Americans are not too interested in analyzing what they hear; they simply want it to have the necessary appeal as music.”¹³⁴ As we shall see, the six operas examined here, despite their disappearance from the performance repertoire, possess both “quality” and “appeal” in full measure. Critics at the time recognized as much, contrary to our inherited view of their opinions that seems to remember only their complaints. Despite the fact that a later generation of American composers would claim nationalist priority ahead of their predecessors, their efforts to compose and stage a grand opera demonstrate a “sincerity, nobility, strength, and beauty” just as Ives would have expected.

* * * * *

The image of the pioneer resonated strongly with both early twentieth-century opera composers and their supporters, for they viewed their own work in this complex genre within the

¹³³ Richard Aldrich, “Indian and Negro Music: The President’s Suggestion as to Their Value for American Composers,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1906.

¹³⁴ Cadman, “Opportunities for the American Composer,” 748.

context of the definitively American pioneering spirit. Edward Hipsher, himself the author of a groundbreaking 1927 account of the nation's first generation of opera composers, wrote of "a small phalanx of creators for the musical stage who have proven their mettle" but "are still quite considerably pioneers."¹³⁵ Cadman too felt this way about his struggles with the genre. Looking back on *Shanewis* from the vantage point of 1936, he reminisced, "It was gratifying to me, and it helped the cause, I hope. I was a pioneer. Of course, pioneering is not a very happy process, but I was very pleased to do my little bit for American opera."¹³⁶ Cadman's friend Lulu Sanford-Tefft echoed the same sentiment in her brief memoir of her friendship with the composer: "Some day we Americans will deeply appreciate this effort of a pioneer in our musical affairs. Pioneering is a long, tiresome task in any line of endeavor, but we shall always be glad that ... he has not left American opera where he found it."¹³⁷ Tracing the journey undertaken by this vanguard collection of individuals—among the first to consistently pursue the operatic trail—shall occupy the remainder of this dissertation, for it is through their works that the style of American Opera begins to emerge.

¹³⁵ Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers*, 13 and 16.

¹³⁶ Cadman speaking in a 1936 radio interview taped in Hawaii, archival audio included on Cambria Master Recordings, CD-100, privately released in 2002. Special thanks to Lance Bowling, producer and owner of Cambria, for providing me with a copy of this disc.

¹³⁷ See Lulu Sanford-Tefft, *Little Intimate Stories of Charles Wakefield Cadman* (Hollywood: David Graham Fischer Corp., 1926), 11.

CHAPTER 2 — Expectations: From Conception to Premiere

Opera is potentially the most effective genre around which to build a national school of music.¹

—Charles Hamm

In the previous chapter, we heard the calls for a national style of American music in general and for American opera in particular. The resultant operatic style, as exemplified in the librettos and music of my six selected operas, will be assessed in the following chapters. However, it is one thing for composers and librettists to demonstrate what they intend to be a national style, but quite another for the public to recognize or accept their work as such. Indeed, composer and writer Clarence E. Le Massena noted in 1911, “If we could start a school or a style by simply thinking out one and adopting it, the task would be comparatively easy. But the American school of opera must be one of development, one of evolution.”² Le Massena seems to have overlooked the equally significant role of the concert-going and music-loving public in approving a musical style as suitably “national.” Any consideration of this topic must follow two complementary threads. The creative efforts of composers and librettists to shape a national style of opera are only half of the equation. In the end, public reception grants the final verdict, as the history of nineteenth-century European national operatic styles makes clear.³ This chapter will trace these two perspectives leading up to each opera’s stage premiere.

¹ Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 446.

² Quoted in “The Outlook for American Opera,” *Current Literature* 50 (1911): 654.

³ For additional focused studies of the formation of national styles of opera, see for example Stephen C. Meyer, *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) and the discussion of Glinka in Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007). On the classical-era antecedents of these 19th-century national styles, see Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 335–63.

The work of Carl Dahlhaus established the foundations for the study of national opera.⁴ His work outlines a set of principles through which an opera can emerge as a specifically National Opera. At their foundation, these principals are supported by the assumption that the roots of nationalism are more firmly linked to compositional intent, social or political function, and audience or critical reception, rather than to a work's empirical, analyzable stylistic elements. Dahlhaus explains, "if a composer intended a piece of music to be national in character and the hearers believe it to be so, that is something which the historian must accept as an aesthetic fact, even if stylistic analysis—the attempt to 'verify' the aesthetic premise by reference to musical features—fails to produce any evidence."⁵ Reception plays a critical role here, for "what does and does not count as national depends primarily on collective opinion." A work can be identified as nationalist when "a sufficient number of the people who make and hear the music" recognize it as such, "and only secondarily, if at all, in its melodic and rhythmic substance."⁶ Dahlhaus also acknowledges that the political and social context surrounding an opera plays a significant role in establishing a work's national credentials. He stresses the importance of "the preconditions, varying from country to country, under which a work was capable of being proclaimed a national opera." These "preconditions" were the focus of the first chapter, and indeed the calls for American opera encountered there would seem to satisfy Dahlhaus's condition that a "national style in music only arises ... at a moment in history when

For an explanation of why the United States did not develop its own national operatic tradition and repertoire in the nineteenth century—what the author calls "the story of failed efforts"—see Joseph Horowitz, *Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 121–47.

⁴ See Carl Dahlhaus, "The Idea of National Opera" in *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 217–26 and "Nationalism and Music" in *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 79–101.

⁵ Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, 86–7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 87–8 and 91–2.

the carrier stratum of a musical culture is demanding a musical expression or reflection of its nationalist political sentiments.” Thus, for Dahlhaus, “the national side of music is to be found less in the music itself than in its political and sociopsychological function.”⁷

Richard Taruskin goes beyond even Dahlhaus in privileging “the role of reception, alongside or even before the composer’s intentions, as a determinant of nationalist significance.”⁸ Particularly in the United States, where opera existed solely as a commercial enterprise, audience demand determined which operas remained in the repertoire. Indeed, as opera-composer Deems Taylor recognized, “The general public likes the new work or doesn’t like it, and so keeps it alive or kills it. [...] In the long run, it is the public that renders the verdict.”⁹ Public opinion plays a role not only after a work has been performed, but even in the days and weeks leading up to a premiere. Hervé Lacombe, in an analysis of French Romantic opera, uses the term “pre-reception” to describe this phenomenon. He explains that “before [an opera] was ever seen, a work was introduced into the sphere of conversation—where fashion was made, where enthusiasms and prejudices were generated, where an idea gradually formed of what would be seen on stage.” Pre-reception is “the buzz ... [that] prefigured the public’s judgment of the work and stimulated expectations and anticipation among the future spectators.”¹⁰ Similar to Lacombe’s 19th-century French scene, American newspaper writers were hard at work to acquaint audiences with the content of any new opera before it hit the stage.

⁷ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 217. Elsewhere, Dahlhaus surmises that “One possible way of escape from the labyrinthine difficulties of finding adequate definitions of what constitutes national ‘substance’ in music is offered by the hypothesis that ... the concept of nationality related not so much to substance as to function” (*Between Romanticism and Modernism*, 91).

⁸ Richard Taruskin, “Nationalism—6. Music and German Nation-Building,” in *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁹ Deems Taylor, *Of Men and Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), 102 and 180.

¹⁰ Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 68–9.

This build-up of anticipation, encouraged by the press, plays an integral part in shaping the outlook for national opera in the United States.

Out of Dahlhaus's theories, one can extract the following set of representative characteristics of national operas: [1] a national opera usually meets with "instantaneous or at least prompt success;" [2] stressing the importance of the "psychological element in the reception," the audience will "identify with the main characters" of a national opera; [3] a national opera often makes an effort to "mediate intrinsically between folk song and art music," even though the use of folk music is not obligatory; [4] the plot of a national opera was often interpreted as a contemporary "political parable."¹¹ It would seem to go without saying that opera-writers will employ the local vernacular. Yet despite the necessity to incorporate distinctively indigenous traits in a potential national opera, Dahlhaus insists that the aesthetic goal remained an international one:

[T]he "national schools" in general preserved a cosmopolitan outlook, insofar as they had no intention that the national music which they created or felt themselves on the way to creating should be excluded from universal art...; on the contrary, the national character of their music was what would ensure for it a place in universal art.¹²

Surely "universal" is too broad of a word. Dahlhaus is really suggesting that a national opera, despite its regional specificity, will still fit in with the mainstream tradition of European opera. Furthermore, it will be meaningful not just to local audiences, but to audiences throughout the opera-attending parts of the world, even if a score's musical and dramaturgical resonance differs

¹¹ List of characteristics derived from Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 219–221.

¹² Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, 83–4. One should note that nowhere does American music enter into Dahlhaus's discussion of nationalism or national opera, although his theories certainly do apply by extension to the music of the American Romanticists and to those opera composers considered here.

Roger Parker presents a similar explanation of how national opera takes shape in his *New Grove* entry on "Opera." He reiterates that "process here is important: rather than appropriating an already existing fund of national musical material, these operas typically constructed that material, becoming 'national' through their cumulative reception." See Roger Parker, "Opera—V. The 19th Century—7. National Traditions," in *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

from place to place. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this characteristic is especially true of American operas during this period, for the competing desires to be distinctly nationalist and to measure up to accepted European standards carried equal weight.

As this chapter will demonstrate, the public and critical desire for a “Great American Opera” often outpaced the more modest hopes of the creators themselves. Unrealistic expectations from nationalist advocates—combined with a continuing distrust of the genre’s foreign origins among opera’s opponents—placed American composers in a particularly perilous situation.¹³ While the genesis of each opera project and the efforts of composers and librettists to bring their work to the stage remain at the center of this chapter’s narrative, “pre-reception” too deserves our attention. In 1910s America, these operas generated more than enough “buzz.” Over-zealous hopes for the long-awaited arrival of “real” American opera ultimately proved more of a hindrance than an inspiration. Henry Krehbiel, for one, complained of “the agitation of the musical patriots who in their eagerness to promote opera in the vernacular seemed to be behaving like children who, on the dawn of every first of January, look out of their windows with the expectancy of seeing a new world.”¹⁴ This overwhelming attitude of “expectancy” is duly captured in the thorough newspaper coverage devoted to the preparations before each premiere. This chapter illustrates the often inspired but frequently rocky road to the operatic stage traced by six potential American national operas. While it is the overall aim of this dissertation to draw connections among the six selected works, in presenting the narrative of

¹³ Edward Hipsher seemed quite disappointed by state of affairs in this country: “Italy has a national opera; so has France; and so has every other nation which fosters the art of operatic performance, excepting England and the United States. With these two countries the powers that rule have conceived and still proclaim that the operatic works and the language of any other country are better than those of these nations possibly could be.” See Edward Ellsworth Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1927), 62.

¹⁴ Henry Edward Krehbiel, *More Chapters of Opera* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), 228.

each opera's path to the stage—from conception to premiere—it is simplest to treat them individually.

Confronting the Opera Genre — Victor Herbert: *Natoma*

Observers of the American operatic scene in the early decades of the twentieth century were well aware of the obstacles that complicated the path of any new opera headed towards a stage premiere. Writers imagined a European system in which opera houses were more than willing to stage new works by local composers. The notion persisted that European composers lived in a land overflowing with opportunity. Opera companies in the United States, on the other hand, seemed all but resistant to indigenous works, thus severely limiting the chances afforded to the American composer. Writers and critics were more than happy to condemn the system, even as the calls for native operas continued unabated. Reginald DeKoven, one of the most protectionist music critics, bitterly complained in 1914 that “at any of our principal opera-houses an unknown German, Frenchman, or Italian has a better chance of having an unknown and untried work produced than an American.”¹⁵ He felt that an untested opera by an inexperienced native composer deserved precedence over foreign “novelties” in a company's repertoire—that is, works by young foreign composers that had already proven successful in European stagings. (Surely, this was an unwinnable argument when confronting an opera manager justifiably concerned with the financial viability of his company.) He was not alone in perceiving the scene in this way. Joseph Kaye, an early biographer of Victor Herbert, likewise observed “a terrific prejudice against American opera—based to some extent on previous unhappy experiences—and all musicians of discrimination went to hear a new American opera with their minds made up as

¹⁵ Reginald DeKoven, “Opera in English: Its Relation to the American Composer and Singer,” *The Century Magazine* 87 (March 1914): 678.

to the outcome and sharply attuned to find the slightest flaw.”¹⁶ Jane Noria, an American singer at the Met during the 1909–1910 season, suggested one possible way to overcome these negative prejudices, as explained in a passionate “Plea for the Development of National Opera”:

[T]he fact remains that there will be no adequate encouragement for the American composer until a theater exists where all the operas are sung in English, when English is the language of every member of the company—at least the singing language. Then, and only then, will the American composer have a chance to work out his own destiny in his own land, with his own singers and his own people.¹⁷

Although Noria’s hopes were to remain unfulfilled, not all observers were quite so sympathetic to the supposed plight of the underappreciated American composer. An unnamed editorialist in *Town and Country* magazine confronted the issue head on:

There is, in fact, a chronic complaint among American composers or their friends that they never get a fair chance; the orchestras will not play their symphonies and tone poems [while] managers will not produce their operas.... It is more interesting to suppose that conductors and managers are engaged in a conspiracy to ignore talent. The charge against conductors and managers would have greater weight if it were accompanied by specific instances. Who, for example, are the composers who suffer under this conspiracy of silence; and what are the immortal works which are denied a hearing? Is there today in existence a single opera, symphony, concerto or other orchestral composition by an American composer of any real musical value which is being withheld from the musical public because conductors prefer inferior foreign works? ... Our own belief is that the native composer is encouraged beyond his intrinsic worth. ... In all branches of composition, the American composer has been accorded hearings where foreign composers would never have been tolerated at all.¹⁸

While the writer’s dismissive attitude towards struggling American composers is fortunately an extreme point of view, his conclusion does ultimately ring true, as the opportunities for my six selected composers demonstrate. While none could boast of multiple opera companies competing for the chance to mount a new work, as was the case with their more illustrious European

¹⁶ Joseph Kaye, *Victor Herbert: The Biography of America’s Greatest Composer of Romantic Music* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1931), 223.

¹⁷ Jane Noria, “A Plea for the Development of National Opera,” *New York Times*, 28 August 1910.

¹⁸ “Notes of the Week,” *Town and Country* 67, no. 49 (15 February 1913): 14.

contemporaries, persistent advocacy for one's own work generally paid off. Opera managers recognized the public demand for new, native-composed works and were thus inclined to consider potential prospects. Indeed, the events surrounding the first production of Victor Herbert's *Natoma* provide a clear illustration of a work that survived on its merits rather than on any pro- or anti-American bias. Despite a troubled path to the stage, Herbert and Redding's unflagging confidence in the quality of their work ultimately secured for *Natoma* a lavishly designed production with a starry cast, accompanied by the most intense level of public interest an American national opera had yet received.

The initial impetus for the project came from impresario Oscar Hammerstein, then at the helm of his own Manhattan Opera Company, rival to the Metropolitan Opera. He first secured the services of a superstar composer, or as much of a superstar composer as has ever existed in this country. Victor Herbert was indeed one of the nation's household names, known for the hit songs from his exceedingly popular light operas or operettas.¹⁹ In fact, Herbert's operettas had been tending towards the direction of grand opera for some time. As the composer's frequent collaborator Harry B. Smith recalled, one early work, *The Fortune Teller*, displeased the public in a London staging because "Herbert's music was too operatic for them and the critics called it 'deafening' and 'ear-splitting.'"²⁰ Likewise, Richard Traubner has observed that "Herbert's musical ambitions [in his operettas] were to create cohesive scores to support libretti that were romantic as much as or more than comic."²¹ In Edward Waters view, Herbert's "experience in

¹⁹ Helen Kaufmann observed that Herbert "had a head start in popular favor over other composers" working on operas contemporary with *Natoma*. See Helen L. Kaufmann, *From Jehovah to Jazz: Music in America from Psalmody to the Present Day* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1937), 146–7.

²⁰ Harry B. Smith, *First Nights and First Editions* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1931), 183. Smith authored the books for fourteen Herbert operettas.

²¹ Richard Traubner, *Operetta: A Theatrical History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 366.

the lighter musical theater, his virtuosity in scoring for orchestra, [and] his thorough training in composition ... made him a man from whom an opera was not only expected but demanded.”²²

Thus, composing a full-scale grand opera was the composer’s natural next step.

From the outset, neither the commissioning impresario nor the hired composer had any idea about what type of opera would ultimately take shape. Again, as Harry Smith explained, Herbert “had unusual facility in setting words to music and his preference at this time was for working in that manner, instead of having the lyric written to fit music already composed.”²³ Thus, Herbert’s first attempt at grand opera would next proceed with the search for a suitable text. How might one be found? Hammerstein opted for a typically American, commercial motivation: “The way to get a libretto is to ask for it and pay for it. So I offer a thousand dollars to the man, preferably an American, who will provide a suitable libretto for Victor Herbert.”²⁴ The composer himself, in 1907 at the earliest planning stages, could only manage a vague but enthusiastic outline for a potential librettist: “I should like ... a vigorous, picturesque and entirely human story arising out of our civilization. ... I should like my opera to be such a genuine and successful work that it would go all over the world as the output of an American brain and the inspiration of American surroundings.”²⁵

Despite Herbert’s imprecision, Joseph Redding, the man who ultimately supplied the libretto for *Natoma*, managed to satisfy all of the composer’s requirements and more. He was an

²² Edward N. Waters, *Victor Herbert: A Life in Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 367.

²³ Smith, *First Nights and First Editions*, 174. Smith also noted that “Herbert was feverishly industrious and always seemed to work at high pressure, even when there was no necessity for it” (184).

²⁴ Quoted in Kaye, *Victor Herbert*, 212.

²⁵ Interview in the *New York Telegraph*, 8 April 1907, quoted in Rosemary Gainer, “*Natoma*, by Victor Herbert: An American ‘Grand’ Opera?” *Opera Journal* 29, no. 4 (1996): 13. Herbert’s biographer Edward Waters observed that the vast public interest surrounding Herbert’s projects “forced him into utterances which could have little meaning” (Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 370).

apt choice for the project. Although an attorney by profession, he was also an experienced composer and conductor. He had previously penned incidental music for a Bohemian Grove play on an Indian subject and would later go on to compose his own grand opera, a Chinese-themed work entitled *Fay-Yen-Fah*.²⁶ Redding was on confident ground in preparing material for Victor Herbert's use. He contrived a subject located in his home state of California that provided Herbert with a varied blend of Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo-American elements, plus an added dose of ecclesiastical earnestness from the Mission priest, nuns and monks. An anonymous critic writing for *The Independent* thought it natural for Redding, "being a Californian, [to choose] his State as the site of the plot, not only because it is the most romantic of all our States, but because it afforded the composer chances to write music in the Indian and Spanish style as well as in that peculiar to the white man."²⁷ Indeed, Redding, then resident in San Francisco but raised in Sacramento, essentially lived among the historical remnants of that which comes to life in his plot.

Ironically, Herbert was originally disinterested in composing an opera with Indian characters. He explained to an interviewer, "If the subject be an American one it is not absolutely necessary that the *dramatis personae* be either Indians or Puritans. Indians are not a suitable subject for an opera. The state of the Indians is pathetic, it is true, but in an opera they would not exactly strike audiences seriously."²⁸ Yet Herbert's reaction was conditioned mainly by the type of dramatized Indian that had already appeared on the stage—villainous ones in melodramas, farcical ones in vaudeville, or the noble savage-type Indians of Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows.

²⁶ This opera was staged in both Monte Carlo and Paris in 1925, making Redding the first American to have an opera produced in France. For more on Redding as an opera composer, see Hipsher, *American Opera*, 366–9.

²⁷ "Victor Herbert's *Natoma*," *The Independent* 70 (1911): 659–60.

²⁸ Uncited quotation in Kaye, *Herbert Biography*, 213.

In the end, Herbert found much to enjoy in *Natoma*'s book, but the appeal was evidently more in terms of its potential for exoticism than nationalism. He was pleased with the historical California setting mainly because "the America of the commercial Anglo-Saxon lacks color, and for an opera there must be color. You don't find Germans, for instance, composing operas with the scenes in Berlin—they lay them in the Black Forest or among the mountains."²⁹

Redding approached his task with a pioneer's attitude, recognizing that he was on the forefront of American operatic production. In a letter to his daughter, written while at work on the libretto, he explained: "I realize the tremendous difficulties of attempting to bring out a great novelty. The story is new, the locality is new, the [character] types are new and I am asking the public to stand for all these creations and to take them in the spirit in which they were written."³⁰ Redding claimed to be quite comfortable when authoring a text intended to be sung. Again, he conveyed his rather inflated self-opinion in a letter to his daughter:

Being a musician myself and possessing what may be called the vibratory make-up, it comes natural to me to construct the sentences so that the attack of the voice, the stress upon syllables, of words and all that applies to musical phrasing, are in singable form. One of the greatest difficulties musical composers have to labor under is in attempting to compose to the work of a librettist who is not a musician or musicianly.³¹

Redding even went so far as to compare his collaboration with Herbert to the great Verdi-Boito pairing, concluding that "I am ambitious to have the public recognize the importance of the libretto for the first time in grand opera."³²

With work on *Natoma* well under way—but not quite finished—Hammerstein jumped the gun by announcing that the work would receive its premiere during the 1909–1910 season, in

²⁹ Herbert quoted in "Opera in English," *The Independent* 70 (23 February 1911): 400.

³⁰ Letter dated 20 September 1909, quoted in Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 373.

³¹ Letter dated 5 November 1909, quoted in *ibid.*, 374.

³² *Ibid.*, 375.

January of the latter year.³³ Redding even expected that the opera might receive foreign openings in 1910, as he optimistically explained to his daughter: “We expect that it will be done in German both at Munich and Berlin sometime next year and also at Milan in Italian and in Paris in French.”³⁴ There were of course doubters. Henry Krehbiel, for one, suggested that the announced premiere was not “taken very seriously in any quarter” since “it is not likely that he will ever attempt to find a suitable grand opera book and set it to music within six or eight months, while occupied, as he is, with a multitude of other enterprises.” Perhaps Krehbiel was honestly misinformed about how much work had already been accomplished; more likely, he intentionally misled readers in an attempt to belittle the composer whom he considered to be nothing more than a “prolific and marvelously ready writer of comic operetta scores.”³⁵

In the end, the work was indeed ready for a January 1910 premiere, but by that point in the season, the impresario was losing his battle against the Met and ostensibly could not afford to finance a brand new production. With a completed opera but no company to produce it, Herbert and Redding arranged for an audition in front of the directors of the Metropolitan Opera. The *New York Times* described it as a “trial rehearsal” at which “an orchestra of sixty musicians, under the direction of Mr. Herbert, played one act of the score” but without any vocalists. Hammerstein in turn threatened to take court action against Herbert and Redding, claiming that

³³ See “Hammerstein Tells of His Opera Plans,” *New York Times*, 1 July 1909; and “Opera of Early California,” *New York Times*, 5 July 1909.

³⁴ Letter dated 5 November 1909, quoted in Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 375. Apparently Redding bought in to Hammerstein’s over-zealous publicity, as the *New York Times* had reported earlier in the year that Hammerstein would produce the work “in Paris and Berlin as well as New York” along with another commissioned American opera from Reginald DeKoven, which in the end would never come to fruition. See “Mary Garden as Trilby,” *New York Times*, 15 July 1909.

³⁵ Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Chapters of Opera*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), 376. Following the work’s premiere, Krehbiel penned one of the most viciously negative reviews of the opera.

his rights to *Natoma* extended for four years.³⁶ Ultimately, both issues would lead to nothing. Gatti-Casazza at the Met declined to produce the work; he already had his own Americanist project—Puccini’s *La Fanciulla del West*—in progress for the upcoming season.³⁷ And within the month, Hammerstein’s competition against the Met was over too. He sold his entire interest in the Manhattan Opera Company to the Metropolitan for the excessive sum of \$1.2 million and promised to produce no more opera in the United States for the next decade, so much did the Met desire to be the city’s preeminent operatic venue.³⁸

Much of the former Manhattan Opera Company was reorganized as the Chicago Opera Company, sometimes referred to as the Philadelphia-Chicago Opera Company, since the cities provided a joint home of sorts for the company during its first few seasons. (Chicago was always the primary location; Philadelphia was the principal touring venue.) Hammerstein’s conductor Cleofonte Campanini remained with the new organization; Andreas Dippel, Gatti-Casazza’s predecessor at the Metropolitan Opera, became manager. Dippel began negotiating for the rights to *Natoma* in early fall of 1910, and by October the opera’s premiere—for the second year in a row—was announced in the press.³⁹ Philadelphia would host the world premiere, New York’s Metropolitan Opera House would host a “special engagement” (a sort of consolation prize for

³⁶ Herbert’s “trial rehearsal” and Hammerstein’s contractual claims are both reported in “Holds Herbert to Contract,” *New York Times*, 2 April 1910. For a further discussion of the *Natoma* contracts, see Gail A. Miller, “Victor Herbert’s *Natoma*: The Creation of an American Grand Opera” (M.A. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1994), 20–3.

³⁷ For an additional viewpoint, see Carolyn Guzski, “American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910–1935: A Contextual History and Critical Survey of Selected Works” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2001), 179.

³⁸ Much of my summary of the final failure of Hammerstein’s company and *Natoma*’s position in the fallout is derived from John Frederick Cone, *Oscar Hammerstein’s Manhattan Opera Company* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 257ff.

³⁹ See “Musical News and Notes,” *New York Times*, 28 August 1910; and “Old California Basis of Opera: Dippel to Produce It,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 October 1910.

Herbert and Redding), and finally Chicago would see the opera on the company's home stage.

Herbert expressed great relief now that his opera had finally found a home:

I can't tell you how grateful Mr. Redding and I are to Mr. Dippel for giving us this chance. It is a simple enough matter for me to get an operetta produced. In fact, I have orders for more than I can write. But when it comes to serious opera—which means good, hard work for a long period of time—there are only one or two markets for it.⁴⁰

Natoma's cast would be headed by two popular stars: Mary Garden created the dramatic soprano role of Natoma and John McCormack sang the heroic tenor lead, Lt. Paul Merrill. The lyric soprano role of Barbara was assigned to Lillian Grenville.⁴¹ (See Appendix C for full cast lists at the premieres of all six operas.) All three lead roles were created by native English speakers, unlike much of the remainder of the cast. It fell to McCormack to help train the other principals in English diction.⁴² The staging would be as top flight as the cast. To capture an authentic California flavor, scenery and costumes were designed by Alexander F. Harmer, an artist who for some time resided in Santa Barbara, the opera's actual locale, in order to compile sketch materials and design ideas.⁴³ (The Library of Congress's online digital photo collection includes four images of the original cast members in costume.⁴⁴) Finally, with Maestro Campanini at the podium, Herbert and Redding could have asked for no better presentation. Audience expectations ran high. Tickets for *Natoma's* New York premiere were the hot item in

⁴⁰ "Victor Herbert's First Serious Opera" [interview with the composer], *New York Times*, 10 October 1910.

⁴¹ Ronald Davis explains that "Campanini always tried to stage new ... operas with established, favorite singers" in order to strengthen box office appeal, a strategy that applies to both *Natoma* and later, *Azora*. See Ronald L. Davis, *Opera in Chicago* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966), 108.

⁴² For McCormack's own humorous reminiscences of his fellow cast members' struggles with Redding's text, see Leonard Alfred George Strong, *John McCormack: The Story of a Singer* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 151–2.

⁴³ For press coverage of the opera's scenery and costumes prior to the premiere, see "News of the Music World," *New York Times*, 23 October 1910; and "At Last, *Natoma*, Long Awaited Opera," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 January 1911.

⁴⁴ See <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>> and search for keyword "Natoma."

town. The Met sold out, and speculators on the street were selling a pair of seats for as much as \$25 (or \$550 in today's money).⁴⁵

Arthur Nevin: *Poia*

Since Herbert's *Natoma* provides a compelling entry point into the struggles involved in bringing an American work to the stage, it was chosen to begin this discussion. With *Poia*, we move back in time to the earliest of the six opera projects considered here. The genesis of this work could not be any more closely tied to the creators' own life experiences. Whereas Herbert simply asked for appropriately American plot material, Nevin actually lived for a time among the people and places that would eventually populate his opera. The story begins, however, around 1901 with Walter McClintock, a pioneering ethnographer who worked with the Blackfeet Indian tribe and was an ardent admirer of the beauty of their music and legends.⁴⁶ Interested in collaborating with a composer who might help him record and transmit their musical heritage, he first inquired if Victor Herbert, then conductor of the Pittsburgh Orchestra, would be interested in joining him in Montana. Herbert declined—unsurprisingly given his busy schedule as a composer and conductor—and instead referred McClintock to another young Pittsburgh composer, Arthur Nevin.⁴⁷ Nevin accepted the offer and spent the summers of 1902 and 1903 on the Blackfeet reservation with McClintock. Both men were warmly welcomed into the Blackfeet community, even picking up nicknames from the tribespeople during their stay. Nevin proudly

⁴⁵ "Opera House Sold Out for *Natoma*," *New York Times*, 28 February 1911.

⁴⁶ My overview of McClintock's interactions with the Blackfeet Indians and his involvement in the *Poia* project draws upon Sherry L. Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880–1940* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000), 67–78.

⁴⁷ For information on Ethelbert Nevin's influence upon his younger brother's composing career, see the correspondence between Ethelbert and other family members quoted in Vance Thompson, *The Life of Ethelbert Nevin: From His Letters and His Wife's Memories* (Boston: Boston Music Co., 1913), 104–5; and John Tasker Howard, *Ethelbert Nevin* (New York: Thomas Y Crowell, 1935), 126–8.

reported that “I became known ... by the Indian name Kutianaantsi, the literal translation being Never-Tie-His-Moccasin-Strings. This name was not given me by reason of an implied neglect, but because I resembled a departed brave of this name.”⁴⁸ McClintock noted that he was called “A-pe-ech-eken [which means] White Weasel, because I was a blonde.”⁴⁹

Unfortunately, the origin of the idea for making an opera out of the Poia legend remains unclear; the two men provide contradictory accounts in which they both claim credit.

McClintock, in his 1910 memoir *The Old North Trail*, recognized that “locked up in the breasts of the old chiefs and medicine men [were] rich treasures of folk-lore, religious beliefs and ceremonials.” Struck by the beauty of their stories and songs—“like pure water from a mountain spring”—he felt that they “were so entirely original and thoroughly American, that they ought to be rescued from oblivion and permanently preserved.” Since he was “deeply impressed with the great possibilities of Indian music,” how better to achieve such preservation, apparently, than in operatic form. McClintock continued, “During [Nevin’s] stay in my Indian tipi, *I proposed* his composing an opera founded on the story of Poia, the most ancient tradition of the Blackfeet, using an Indian environment and Indian musical themes” (emphasis added).⁵⁰ He includes a detailed and thorough telling of the legend in *The Old North Trail*. McClintock recognized the story as the Blackfeet analogue to the Christian gospel narrative; it explains the origins of the most sacred Blackfeet ceremony, the Sun Dance.⁵¹ McClintock made this legend a central part of

⁴⁸ Arthur Nevin, “Two Summers with the Blackfeet Indians of Montana,” *Musical Quarterly* 2 (1916): 262.

⁴⁹ Walter McClintock, *The Old North Trail; or Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1910), 401.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, vii, 283 and 518–9.

⁵¹ McClintock’s version—“Legend of Poia, the Christ Story of the Blackfeet”—occupies Chapter 38 of his book (*ibid.*, 491–9).

his own popular “lantern-slide illustrated lectures,” in which he “regaled audiences with ... tales of Scarface and the Sun Dance.”⁵²

Six years after McClintock’s memoir appeared, Nevin published his own recollections of his time with the Blackfeet Indians in a 1916 *Musical Quarterly* article. Like McClintock, Nevin was immediately attracted to their music. He wrote that the sound of Indian singing “filled me with enthusiasm and thrilled me with the possibilities I felt to be latent in their music” (note the consistent use of singular personal pronouns).⁵³ At least in hindsight, Nevin sought to portray that his composer’s instincts were immediately at work. When he explains the origin of the idea to write an opera, it is noteworthy that he neglects even to mention McClintock’s presence:

It was the last night of the Sun Dance, that seated in [Chief Big Moon’s] wigwam, I heard the story of “Poia,” the son of the Morning Star and the great prophet to the Blackfeet Indians. During that night ... I was filled with the beauty of the Poia legend and made up my mind then that as soon as I could find it possible, that legend was to be put into libretto form for a serious grand opera. ... [The following summer] I went more thoroughly into the legend of Poia, and found the poetic tale always more alluring as I learned from time to time the many episodes of the hero’s life.⁵⁴

Contrary to Nevin’s own account, Sherry Smith suggests that while on the reservation the composer was hardly an enthusiastic ethnographer. In her telling, Nevin soon “grew tired of camp life with its hardships and lack of privacy. He spent most of his days smoking by the fire ... or stretched out on his bed.”⁵⁵ It would certainly appear as if Nevin sought to portray himself in the best possible light.

⁵² Smith, *Reimagining Indians*, 3.

⁵³ Nevin, “Two Summers with the Blackfeet,” 259–60. Nevin includes this colorful description of his first encounter with Indian music: “I must have been over a mile from the encampment when there came floating on this soft breeze over the prairie grass and flowers and beneath the beautiful, blue heavens, the first faint murmur of Indian drums. Stopping my pony, I listened for a moment; then overcome by impatience to be in the picture which my imagination was drawing, I urged my bronco into a hard gallop” (ibid., 257).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 268–9.

⁵⁵ Smith, *Reimagining Indians*, 74.

Nevin's librettist Randolph Hartley, however, was not involved in these trips to the reservation. By profession, he was a press agent and manager of theater actors, although he did write the libretti for both of Nevin's operas.⁵⁶ Yet despite his absence on the reservation visits, Edward Hipsher found Hartley to be "peculiarly fitted for his adventure" with *Poia*. He came from a literary family and spent much of his childhood in the West, where "his father, a clergyman and writer, was long stationed on the Colorado and California frontiers."⁵⁷ Thus, he grew up surrounded by a similarly undeveloped American landscape as that which forms the backdrop of the Poia legend.

In order to achieve the type of dramatic balance required for opera, Nevin and Hartley invented the villain character Sumatsi, Poia's rival for the love of Natoya. This refocuses the narrative away from one of cosmological and religious significance, as in McClintock's published account, and instead advances a more traditionally operatic, romantically motivated plot. Indeed, Sumatsi is the first character heard in the opera, bragging of his victories in battle, although there is minimal direct conflict between him and Poia. In contrast, Poia is revealed as a downtrodden outcast, rejected by the tribe and Natoya. Thus, his heroic quest to the realm of the Sun God is more about romantic fulfillment than about spiritual discovery. By excising this didactic aspect of the legend, Nevin and Hartley are careful to avoid what could have seemed like an endorsement of "pagan" religious beliefs. While the Poia legend lies at the heart of Blackfeet religious practices, the *Poia* opera remains comfortably within the norms of operatic exoticism.

⁵⁶ See the obituary, "Randolph Hartley: New Yorker Who Had Represented Many Stage Stars Dies," *New York Times*, 7 April 1931.

⁵⁷ Hipsher, *American Opera*, 342.

Poia's path to the stage was, if anything, even more fraught than *Natoma*'s. As early as 1904, McClintock organized a so-called Nevin Fund to begin financing a production of the opera.⁵⁸ When approached, the Met declined to stage the work before hearing a note of the score, for at this point the organization was not yet in the business of presenting new American works. Nevin's hometown Pittsburgh Orchestra presented two brief excerpts at a concert in January 1905. The program notes from this concert, preserved at the Autry National Center's Braun Research Library, emphasize the Indian color and character of Nevin's score.⁵⁹ The city's music-lovers must have been suitably impressed, for the town later hosted an unstaged concert reading of the entire score on 16 January 1907. The composer himself conducted the Pittsburgh Orchestra, various soloists, and a chorus of two hundred voices. The performance was apparently "enthusiastically received."⁶⁰ This event raised national awareness, especially sparking the interest of Francis E. Leupp, the federal government's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who attended the Pittsburgh concert. Curiosity about the opera continued to expand, culminating in an invitation from President Theodore Roosevelt himself. Thus on 23 April 1907, McClintock and Nevin visited the White House to present their work. The next morning's *Washington Post* offered this report of the event:

At the musicale given last evening at the White House, Mrs. Roosevelt's guests enjoyed a rendition of the Indian grand opera, *Poia*, described and rendered by the composer, Mr. Arthur Nevin, of Pittsburgh.

As a preliminary to the exposition of the score by Mr. Nevin, Mr. Walter McClintock ... presented a series of fascinating pictures, illustrative of the story upon which the

⁵⁸ Much of the following information is derived from Smith, *Reimagining Indians*, 74–5. Note that Smith incorrectly locates the concert premiere as having taken place at New York City's Carnegie Hall, rather than Pittsburgh's.

⁵⁹ This archive, which houses the Walter McClintock Manuscript Collection, has shared these program notes on their website; see "Opera Collection Spotlight" <<http://theautry.org/collections/opera>>. The program notes include a biographical summary of Nevin's activities up to 1905.

⁶⁰ "An Indian Grand Opera," *New York Times*, 17 January 1907.

music is founded. A great screen was thrown across the north end of the East Room and as the pictures were displayed Mr. McClintock gave a clever exposition of the legends and traditions of the Blackfeet Indians [which form the basis of the opera]. [...]

The President, who was among the most interested spectators, entered heartily into the spirit of the occasion, leading the applause not only in the presentation of the pictures, but in the course of the illustrative lecture, when Mr. Nevin accompanied his explanatory remarks with selections from the vocal and instrumental score.⁶¹

Nevin himself, in a later article written shortly after the President's death, described this White House visit as "one of the pleasantest and most vivid memories of my life." He recalled that as his lecture proceeded:

...I felt myself throwing more energy into my talk than on any other occasion when I had lectured on the same subject. The reason for this was that I was delighted to encounter such genuine and sincere interest as the President showed. I had expected polite attention, but had not been talking long before I realized that the President was enthusiastic about it. As I talked I was aware that the President's gaze was fastened upon me and his face wore an expression of absorbed interest.⁶²

Roosevelt's enthusiasm at hearing this Blackfeet legend told through music matched the composer's excitement for his presidential encounter. Nevin was amazed to discover after his performance that "President Roosevelt [could carry] on a conversation with me in the sign language of the Blackfeet Indians. I was astounded and delighted at this exhibition." The impression was lasting: "I carried away from that wonderful evening an abiding impression of Colonel Roosevelt's energy, enthusiasm and sincere interest in all the subjects that we discussed."⁶³ Despite this intense level of interest in *Poia* and the President's own support for the work, no stateside production was forthcoming, indicative of the still-limited commitment to American works in the early years of the century. A later press clipping from 1910 claimed that,

⁶¹ "Unique Musical Entertainment Given at White House: Indian Opera Interpreted," *Washington Post*, 24 April 1907. See also Elise K. Kirk, *Music at the White House: A History of the American Spirit* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 185.

⁶² Arthur Nevin, "Colonel Roosevelt Knew the Blackfeet Wigwag," *New York Tribune*, 28 September 1919.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

despite the endorsement of conductor Alfred Hertz and soprano Joanna Gadski, the Metropolitan Opera “turned down [*Poia*] unread” while Oscar Hammerstein at the Manhattan Opera “told him to get a European production for it and then come and talk to him again.”⁶⁴

Nevin looked specifically to Germany, where he had received his formal music training. In this, the composer sought to participate in a long and fruitful artistic interchange between the continents.⁶⁵ Moreover, Germany offered Nevin the opportunity to capitalize on that country’s turn-of-the-century vogue for Indians and the American West.⁶⁶ His opera presented a topic, setting, and themes that were already drawing much popular attention. Thus, Nevin travelled to Berlin towards the end of 1907, while the Washington press closely followed his progress. The report came back: “The managements of the royal operas at Berlin, Munich, and Dresden all think favorably of Mr. Nevin’s wholly unique theme, and the New Year is likely to see *Poia*’s presentation on all three of these important stages.” From the outset, however, Nevin pursued an approach to casting that would ultimately damage the prospects of his opera irreparably: “It is Mr. Nevin’s desire, in order to give the maximum local color, to provide the piece with an exclusively American cast from the ever-growing number of American singers now winning laurels in Germany.”⁶⁷ Later reports make no mention of Munich, but it is clear that Dresden ultimately declined the opera. Berlin accepted the work, but without agreeing to any specific timetable for a performance.

⁶⁴ Quotations drawn from the middle of an otherwise unrelated column: Fred F. Schrader, “New Plays in Gotham,” *Washington Post*, 1 May 1910.

⁶⁵ Franz Liszt’s and Longfellow’s mutual interest in each other’s works is one pertinent precedent here; see Edward N. Waters, “Liszt and Longfellow,” *The Musical Quarterly* 41 (1955): 1–25.

⁶⁶ The novels of Wild West adventure by German author Karl May are one prominent example. For a collection of studies of this trend, see Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemünden, and Susanne Zantop, eds., *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

⁶⁷ Quotations appear at the end of an article about a failed opera by Eugene D’Albert: “Comic Opera that Failed,” *Washington Post*, 8 December 1907.

Nevin would have to wait until June 1909 when the Berlin Royal Opera finally announced plans to produce the work at the conclusion of their upcoming season. This was indeed a momentous decision, as a *New York Times* reporter boasted:

The acceptance of this piece is an epoch-making event, because it marks the first substantial recognition ever accorded to transatlantic composers in the land where Beethoven and Wagner were born. American composers hitherto have not been taken very seriously in Germany. Their productive genius has been considered to be limited to ragtime and marches. *Poia* promises to result in a revision of the Teuton critics' view.⁶⁸

Controversy, unfortunately, was as imminent as the event was “epoch-making.” While news of *Poia*’s acceptance was “not yet public in Berlin,” it was apparent that “when it is there will undoubtedly be a fresh howl about the American invasion.”⁶⁹ Indeed, the New York press had been following this developing story for some time. A report from March 1908, for instance, noted that “the Americanization of the Kaiser’s Royal Opera continues,” drawing particular attention to the singers Florence Easton and Putnam Griswold, both of whom would go on to create lead roles in *Poia*. The report explained that these singers “now practically monopolize all stellar honors for stage roles” and that “native German singers are outraged beyond expression at the growing proportions of the American invasion,” some even threatening to resign.⁷⁰ Out of this climate of suspicion and distrust, the rumors began to swirl. Some German critics suggested that Humperdinck (Nevin’s teacher) had revised or even reorchestrated the opera’s score in order to make it more presentable, and that the Kaiser himself had pressured the opera’s management into presenting the work as a personal favor to former President Roosevelt. Both rumors were

⁶⁸ “Nevin’s Work Taken For Kaiser’s Opera,” *New York Times*, 20 June 1909.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “Yankee Singers Lead Kaiser’s Opera,” *New York Times*, 15 March 1908.

aired and later refuted in the *New York Times*.⁷¹ Possibly Nevin did revise the score between its 1907 Pittsburgh performance and the 1910 Berlin stage premiere, but Humperdinck had no hand in the score's orchestration. Nevin defended his work by noting what Humperdinck told Nevin's wife: "I am glad that I did not see the scoring of the last two acts, as I should have advised changes which would have been less effective for their purpose than Mr. Nevin's instrumentation."⁷² Perhaps the rumor arose in part because of the fact that Humperdinck sat on the committee that officially accepted *Poia* into the Berlin Royal Opera's repertoire.⁷³ Much of the skepticism over the Kaiser's direct involvement stems from the fact that Walter McClintock was contemporaneously courting powerful patrons in Berlin in an effort to disseminate his own work as ethnographer.⁷⁴

Admittedly, I am here presenting only the American side of this complex issue. Additional research into German newspaper sources would be necessary to complete the picture. Likely, the American writers are blowing the anti-American rhetoric out of proportion in comparison to all of the sensitive political and personal issues involved in the staging of new operas. However, it is clear that the American press coverage is grounded in reports from singers employed overseas and in commentary from the Berlin critics themselves. As these reports make clear, there is no question that at least some portion of the German opera audience and critical

⁷¹ Regarding Humperdinck's supposed revision or orchestration of the score, see second paragraph of "Honor for Hammerstein," 21 November 1909; and the retraction in "Attack American Opera," 5 December 1909. Regarding the Kaiser's influence, see the interview with Putnam Griswold, "Berlin Hostile to American Singers," 4 December 1911; and the immediate refutation in an anonymous letter to the editor "Corrects Putman Griswold," 5 December 1911.

⁷² Nevin interviewed in "Explains Berlin's Attack Upon *Poia*," *Musical America* 12, no. 2 (21 May 1910): 25.

⁷³ And, apparently, around the time of *Poia*'s premiere, a young German composer, whose opera had not been accepted for performance, committed suicide, further inflaming the controversy. See Hipsher, *American Opera*, 338–9.

⁷⁴ For McClintock's activities during these weeks, see Smith, *Reimagining Indians*, 75–7.

commentators were troubled by the ever-expanding presence of Americans on their nation's stages. Yet at the same time, we must not overlook the unstated motives implied in the desire to claim an "epoch-making" priority for *Poia* and American opera. With this nation's composers struggling to earn a place in the international arena, it was all the more necessary to highlight the controversial and epochal aspects of *Poia*'s Berlin production.

While these controversies raged in the New York press, preparations for the opera went ahead as they might for any Berlin premiere. *Poia* received a top-tier lineup of singers, drawn from the Royal Opera's best. The eminent Carl Muck, an experienced Bayreuth conductor, took the podium.⁷⁵ (Photos from the original production are held at the Braun Research Library and viewable online.⁷⁶) Even as preparations progressed smoothly within the opera house, a positive audience reception was anything but assured given the complex circumstances surrounding the opera's acceptance into the season's lineup. This portion of the narrative will resume in the final chapter.

Frederick Converse: *The Sacrifice*

The history of Converse's second opera, *The Sacrifice*, begins not with the work itself but rather with the composer's involvement in the establishment of Boston's own resident opera company (in 1909) that would later host the work's premiere. Whereas Herbert and Nevin struggled to find a venue to host their operas' premieres, Converse instead opted to found one for

⁷⁵ Muck twice served as music director of the Boston Symphony, from 1906–1908 and 1912–1918. Although tangential to the present narrative, Muck's second Boston tenure ended in a controversy outrivaling that of the *Poia* premiere. Muck was interred at Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia during World War I for his supposedly pro-German sympathies, despite the fact that he was officially a Swiss citizen. For more, see Edmund A. Bowles, "Karl Muck and his Compatriots: German Conductors in America during World War I (And How They Coped)," *American Music* 25 (2007): 405–40.

⁷⁶ For three stills of the cast on stage and two images of *Poia* and Natosi in costume, see <<http://theautry.org/collections/opera>>.

himself. He played an integral role from the beginning of the undertaking, serving as one of the Boston Opera Company's vice presidents. His main task was to secure a board of directors and to find enough subscribers to fill the house's forty-six boxes, a task of the utmost importance since the subscriber fees amounted to an annual intake of \$98,000.⁷⁷ This entire venture, brainchild of impresario Henry Russell and department-store magnate Eben D. Jordan, Jr., radically altered the cultural scene of the city. Writing in 1904, Louis Elson explained, "Boston has been chronologically the first in the field of oratorio and orchestra, and may still be considered the center of these schools of music in America. But the city is provincial in the matter of grand opera."⁷⁸ Sensing the growing popularity of opera, presented by a variety of touring companies throughout the late 19th century, Jordan and Russell felt the time was right for the city to host its own resident company. With a brand new, million-dollar opera house, the Boston Opera Company opened its first season on 8 November 1909. The day before that first performance, Converse noted in his diary that the "opening will be the realization of a dream for me" which would surely lead to "serious, indigenous opera in America."⁷⁹

With work on the formation of the Boston Opera Company well under way, in 1908 Converse relocated temporarily to Vevey, Switzerland, and travelled widely "so that he might come in contact with musical influences there."⁸⁰ He composed much of *The Sacrifice* while in

⁷⁷ For a thorough survey of the company's entire history, see Quaintance Eaton, *The Boston Opera Company* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1965). Information on Converse's involvement in the startup of the venture, see Eaton, 10–11, and Robert J. Garofalo, *Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871–1940): His Life and Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 33–5.

⁷⁸ Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 361. Elson's original edition, in which the quotation also appears, was first published in 1904.

⁷⁹ Diary entry of 7 November 1909, quoted in Garofalo, *Frederick Shepherd Converse*, 34–5.

⁸⁰ The quotation is Ruth Severance's, who was a student of Converse at the New England Conservatory. She completed her master's thesis on Converse with the composer's input—"The Life and Work of Frederick Shepherd Converse" (M.A. thesis, Boston University, 1932), 5.

Europe, knowing that he would have a welcoming performance venue waiting upon his return to the States. Of the six composers examined here, Converse was the only one to author his own libretto. He was pleased with the success of this procedure, explaining, “I find that I can weld music and text more firmly together, in this manner, than ever before.”⁸¹ Converse wrote his text in prose but later invited John Macy, whose name shares the title page of the libretto with Converse, to versify some particular portions of the text that he felt required a more poetic diction. Macy explained to an interviewer, “[The opera] was all but finished before I saw it. I am not the author of the greater portion of the book, as one paper said. I merely wrote the words for two or three lyric passages, the music of which was already done and which called for some rather more formal versifying than the free dialogue of the rest of the book.”⁸²

Curiously enough, Converse did not originally intend to set an American subject for this, his second opera. His first thoughts drew him to Euripides’ *Hippolytus* before he chanced upon the book *Los Gringos*, a part-memoir and part-travelogue written by Henry Augustus Wise, a lieutenant in the U. S. Navy during the Mexican-American War.⁸³ The seed for the plot comes from Wise’s chapter XXVI, entitled “Dolores and Her Lover.” As Wise relates in his book, while stationed in the Mexican city of Mazatlán on the Pacific coast, he befriended a woman named Dolores but called Lola. The author gives this description of her:

[She had] sweeping masses of jet-black hair ... soft feminine features, [and a] pale complexion, lighted by large, languid dark eyes. She was a tall and slender girl, but with the smallest feet I ever beheld. ... Her mind appeared to partake of the mournful

⁸¹ Diary entry of 24 December 1908, quoted in Garofalo, *Frederick Shepherd Converse*, 44. One unnamed writer viewed this as “a procedure not to be commended as a rule, for up to the present time Richard Wagner is the only composer who has proved to have a right to be classed with dramatic poets.” See “An American Opera in Boston,” *The Independent* 70 (30 March 1911): 658.

⁸² “Boston Tomorrow Hears New Opera,” *Boston Globe*, 2 March 1911.

⁸³ Converse revealed this in an interview that appeared a few months before the work’s premiere; “Boston Man Has Written a New Opera,” *Boston Globe*, 27 November 1910.

signification of her name, and, even during her gayest moments, she was always tinged with sadness. Poor Lola! She was thinking of her lover, who had left with the troops on our coming.⁸⁴

Wise's Lola becomes the opera's Chonita, renamed because Converse found the name Dolores "somewhat hackneyed."⁸⁵ Lola has a wise, old Indian servant named Tomasa, the only character whose original name Converse retained in the libretto. From Wise, Converse borrowed the theme of Lola's love for a Mexican Army officer, but in his construction of the tenor lead Bernal, he essentially invented a new character. In the book, Lola's unnamed Mexican lover beats her "from idle jealousy, or natural brutality of disposition."⁸⁶ She soon dies of her injuries, with the author's persona remaining a loyal companion to the end. The choice to alter the source material allows Converse to present a plot more palatable to conservative opera audiences. What we would today term "domestic abuse" would surely have faced disapproval especially from the Boston audience. For the opera, he relocated the action to southern California (a bizarre coincidence given *Natoma's* contemporaneous premiere) and constructed a plot that focuses on Burton's difficult choice between his duty as an American officer and his love for Chonita. Bernal now becomes Chonita's loyal beloved rather than an abusive and derelict lover. Burton's ultimate "sacrifice"—giving up his own life and allowing Chonita and Bernal to escape to freedom—is entirely of Converse's invention. Thus, his adaptation constructs a traditional love triangle in place of the disturbing anecdote recorded by Wise.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Henry A. Wise, *Los Gringos, or an Inside View of Mexico and California* (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), 159.

⁸⁵ "Boston Man Has Written a New Opera," *Boston Globe*, 27 November 1910.

⁸⁶ Wise, *Los Gringos*, 160.

⁸⁷ In addition to drawing upon *Los Gringos*, one newspaper column reported that "Converse has read deeply into his subject. He has found historical data and a stimulant to fancy and the creation of atmosphere in Blackmar's *The Southwest*, Alexander Forbes' *Early Days in California*, Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, and in magazine articles." See "New Opera in English by Mr. Converse," *Boston Globe*, 26 February 1911.

With preparations for the premiere underway, a most unusual notice appeared in the *Boston Globe*:

Aroused by what they consider a musical injustice to their country in having Puccini's latest work, *The Girl of the Golden West*, receive its initial production in America, Italian music lovers have decided to retaliate and are at present bending their efforts toward securing the consent of Frederick S. Converse to have his new opera, *The Sacrifice*, receive its stage baptism in Italy.⁸⁸

In fact, Carlo Venzaghi, described in this report as "one of the leading spirits in the management of the famous La Scala opera house," travelled to Boston for the sole purpose of convincing Converse to allow an Italian production to preempt the planned hometown premiere. Venzaghi spoke effusively to the press, claiming that Italy would be "the first country to hail Mr. Converse as one of the great composers of modern times" and hoping that Converse's opera might "give a fresh impetus to the art of grand opera in Italy."⁸⁹ Ultimately, nothing would ever come of Venzaghi's efforts, not even a subsequent European premiere. He clearly misunderstood the personal significance for Converse to premiere his new opera at the company he helped to found. Yet what is most compelling about this exchange is that it is indicative of a burgeoning sense of operatic rivalry between the two nations. This would have been unimaginable only a few years before, illustrating just how far the United States' command of the genre had progressed. An alternate explanation, however, would downplay the significance of this entire episode. The principal Converse biographical sources make no mention of any European interest in mounting the work. Perhaps, as with the earlier coverage of the *Poia* controversy, an implicit desire for Americanist advancement is at work here. What better way to heighten the interest in a new

⁸⁸ "New Opera by Mr. Converse," *Boston Globe*, 5 September 1910.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

operatic production than to suggest that opera companies from Italy, the homeland of opera, were jealous of Boston, a relative newborn in terms of operatic history?

The premiere was strategically scheduled to occur around revivals, thereby directing more attention to the new work. Boston's press could be counted on to provide ample advance publicity—Converse was, after all, related to the newspaper owners through marriage.⁹⁰ Wallace Goodrich, another local Bostonian, would take the podium, having earlier conducted the premiere of Converse's first opera, *The Pipe of Desire*.⁹¹ Most significantly, Alice Nielsen would enact Chonita, the soprano lead. She first achieved fame on the operetta stage, including roles written by Victor Herbert, before transitioning into a grand opera diva with the Boston Opera Company.⁹² She was as enthusiastic as anyone involved in the project, calling the premiere "the most important date in American musical history" and "the beginning of real American opera."⁹³

Mary Carr Moore: *Narcissa*

If Converse's understanding of the West came primarily through his reading of Wise's memoir, Moore and her mother with their opera *Narcissa* were, like Redding, writing about a part of the country that was their own home—the Pacific Northwest. Edward Hipsher recognized this deeper connection, writing that the opera "emanate[es] from the beauty, spirit, history, stirring events, traditions and tragedy of the Great Northwest."⁹⁴ Carr brings the territory most

⁹⁰ See Eaton, *The Boston Opera Company*, 92–3.

⁹¹ Note that the Boston Opera Company also had plans to premiere Converse's third opera, *The Immigrants*, as part of its sixth season. However, a costly tour to Paris at the end of the fifth season bankrupted the organization, making future seasons impossible. *The Immigrants* would remain unperformed in Converse's lifetime.

⁹² For more on Alice Nielsen and her operatic career with the Boston Opera Company, see Eaton, *The Boston Opera Company*, 26–7 and 30–6.

⁹³ Quoted in an interview, "Boston Tomorrow Hears New Opera," *Boston Globe*, 2 March 1911.

⁹⁴ Hipsher, *American Opera*, 330.

vividly to life in Act II, which, situated somewhere between the styles of an historical tableaux and French grand opera, presents a reenactment of life at the frontier Fort Vancouver. Yet even more significant than this geographical connection is the personal resonance that the history of Narcissa Whitman held for composer, librettist and the original audience in Seattle alike. One newspaper commentator described the plot as being “of such intimacy and familiarity as to claim the especial attention of the entire Pacific Northwest.”⁹⁵

The opera focuses on the real-life Congregational missionaries, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, who in 1836 founded a mission at Waiilatpu in the Oregon Territory (near present day Walla Walla, Washington) in order to introduce Christianity to the native Cayuse Indians.⁹⁶ As Marcus proved an ineffective evangelist and Narcissa grew discouraged with her attempts to educate Indian children at the mission school, the Whitmans’ focus shifted more towards meeting the needs of the ever-increasing number of white settlers. Their mission ultimately became a significant arrival point near the end of the Oregon Trail. The Cayuse were already growing distrustful of the Whitmans because of the expanding white population when a measles outbreak killed or sickened many Indians. Although Marcus, a trained physician, treated both Indians and whites with equal care, the far higher death toll on the Indian side (because they had no natural immunity) drove tensions to the breaking point. Marcus was suspected of sorcery—of trying to kill off the Cayuse in order to make way for white migration. On 29 November 1847, a group of Cayuse attacked the mission, killing both Whitmans and twelve others, in addition to holding almost 50 hostages for over a month. Narcissa was the only woman killed in what is now known as the “Whitman Massacre.”

⁹⁵ Paul C. Hedrick, “Music,” *Seattle Times*, 21 April 1912.

⁹⁶ For an authoritative biography, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Converting the West: A Biography of Narcissa Whitman* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

In bringing this history to the operatic stage, librettist Sarah Pratt Carr explains that “the theme of the opera” is the “missionary passion” of the Whitmans, “with patriotism as a second motive scarcely less powerful.”⁹⁷ In particular, Moore and her mother, as progressive feminists, felt they could connect personally to Narcissa Whitman, who for them is a model of female bravery and perseverance. Moiya Callahan has extensively explored this angle in her Master’s thesis on the opera. Callahan outlines their view of Narcissa:

This woman, instead of fulfilling ... traditional female roles..., is a missionary, a domestic feminist who challenges male authority by entering his sphere. Rather than being driven by sexual passion to search for love and fulfillment among men, she is consumed with a missionary passion that drives her to save all humankind. Focusing on this missionary passion, the main theme of the opera, emphasizes her professional calling rather than her sexuality.⁹⁸

The operatic Narcissa certainly bears little resemblance to the soprano heroine archetype. While she is clearly in love with Marcus, this expected romantic aspect of an opera plot is quickly dispatched in the first act. The remainder of Narcissa’s major scenes instead focus on her perseverance and dedication to a calling that ultimately culminates in Narcissa’s death. But, unlike *The Sacrifice*, in which Converse’s Burton rather predictably dies for love, Moore and Carr’s Narcissa upends the typical tragic heroine stereotype. As Callahan rightly observes, this Narcissa is an example of strength rather than weakness.

Parallel to her focus on Narcissa, Carr also desired to enact a “sympathetic treatment” of the Indians, as she explains in the preface to the libretto:

⁹⁷ Sarah Pratt Carr, *The Cost of Empire: Libretto for the Opera Narcissa* (Seattle, Wash.: The Stuff Printing Concern, 1912), 3.

⁹⁸ Moiya Callahan, “Mary Carr Moore’s *Narcissa*” (M.M. thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1999), 106. Callahan argues, “Narcissa is a projection of Moore’s vision of the ideal woman, a progressive woman with both domestic and public responsibilities, feminine and masculine qualities” (99). Elsewhere, J. Michele Edwards and Leslie Lasseter stress the originality of *Narcissa* “in presenting the drama through a woman’s eyes;” see “North America Since 1920,” in *Women & Music: A History*, 2nd ed., ed. Karin Pendle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 318. Also see Catherine Parsons Smith, “Athena at the Manuscript Club: John Cage and Mary Carr Moore,” *Musical Quarterly* 79 (1995): 361–2.

Misunderstood, defrauded, outraged, his [i.e., the Indian's] relations with Americans make that chapter in our history one of growing shame, that no plea of the "destiny of the white race" can ever efface. The Whitmans least of all people deserved their martyrdom; yet according to Indian ethics—certainly as good as the standard of the white Americans—their lives paid only a just debt.⁹⁹

Thus *Narcissa*, among this group of operas, presents a uniquely nuanced view of Indian-White relations. (Apparently, Moore and Carr either are willing to overlook or are unaware of the historical Narcissa's less than empathetic concern for the Indians within her mission field.) The romantic entanglements that typically drive an opera's action are here largely absent. Carr crafted a libretto that presents a series of scenic tableaux instead of a dramatically continuous plot. Her goals were to depict on the lyric stage the rapture of the missionary calling (Act I), a documentary-style frontier town scene (Act II), life at the Waiilatpu mission (Act III), and the events surrounding the massacre itself (Act IV). Carr asserts that her libretto "follows history almost exactly, departing from it only in trifles and in compressing events, to fit the necessities of stage portrayal."¹⁰⁰ Compared to most operas based on historical events, her claim is relatively truthful, despite the fact that the real-life Narcissa is a far less heroic figure than Moore and Carr portray. With its didactic focus and reduced level of romance, *Narcissa* offers an alternative approach to how one might create an American National Opera.

Moore found an equally inspirational parallel for Narcissa in her own mother's life. Callahan explains that Carr's "active work as a club organizer, writer, and Unitarian minister provided Moore with an example of a hard working domestic feminist who stood up for the equal worth of women's work and capabilities in a man's world."¹⁰¹ These two exemplars were essential motivators for Moore as she undertook the task of composing, rehearsing, and

⁹⁹ Carr, *The Cost of Empire*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰¹ Callahan, "Mary Carr Moore's *Narcissa*," 33.

conducting the premiere of her opera—an exceedingly unusual task for a woman in the 1910s (and still today).¹⁰² Moore’s experience leading up to the project, while not the standard background for an opera composer, did uniquely prepare her for the challenge. Her primary training was as a soprano under the voice teacher Henry Bickford Pasmore. She also studied composition with her uncle, John Harraden Pratt. Both teachers had trained in Leipzig and made an effort to offer their pupil as close to a European conservatory education as they could. Her first contact with grand opera was primarily through several touring opera companies and at the Tivoli Opera House in San Francisco—all in English-language performances. At the age of 20, in 1894, she performed the lead role in her first composition for the stage, an operetta called *The Oracle*.¹⁰³

During this period of her life, Moore first grew enthused about the American music movement as a member of the Seattle Ladies Musical Club.¹⁰⁴ The club provided an important performance outlet for her early works and first introduced her to the music of American Indians. Here she also first became acquainted with the Americanist goals of Arthur Farwell, with whom she began to correspond. As Moore’s biographers explain, “Farwell’s call for an American national music struck a responsive chord with Moore, for it invited her to attempt great, important, patriotic things in her art, as her father, grandfather, and uncles had done in their military service and working careers.”¹⁰⁵ Her connection to Farwell would prove to be of prime

¹⁰² Also refer back to Hammerstein’s comment that he would pay “a thousand dollars to the **man** ... who will provide a suitable libretto for Victor Herbert.”

¹⁰³ For a more detailed exploration of Moore’s early years, see Catherine Parsons Smith, “A Musical Apprenticeship in San Francisco,” *Halcyon* 7 (1985): 41–58.

¹⁰⁴ See Karen J. Blair, “The Seattle Ladies Musical Club, 1890–1930,” in *Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History*, ed. G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 124–9.

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Parsons Smith and Cynthia S. Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore, American Composer* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 70.

significance. When Moore and her mother first struck upon the idea of using the Whitman history as the basis for an opera, the composer did not at first believe her composing skills were up to the task. Hence, she approached both Farwell and Henry Hadley to see if they would consider taking up the subject. (Hadley was then conductor of the Seattle Symphony.) Moore recalled her eventual resolve: “After this theme had simmered and smouldered in my mind for several years, I began to think that possibly, as no one else seemed eager, I must perform this labor of love myself. ... It was with great joy and a spirit of devotion that I set forth upon the work.”¹⁰⁶ This was indeed a significant decision, testing her skills far beyond her previous experience as a composer primarily of parlor songs and an operetta. The compositional process itself was an arduous one. Moore recalled, “The actual sketch of the opera took about eight months, for my leisure for composition was limited. A busy household, many outside demands and three dear children made inroads upon strength and time. The following year was devoted to orchestral scoring.”¹⁰⁷ These competing pressures on her time must surely have heightened her sympathy for the challenges faced by Narcissa, as a wife, foster mother, and teacher at a frontier mission. Upon reviewing the completed work, Arthur Farwell was impressed enough to intervene on her behalf and convince his publisher, Witmark, to issue a piano-vocal score of the completed opera.¹⁰⁸

With the orchestration complete, Moore’s unflagging enthusiasm for the work soon yielded a performance opportunity. She secured the services of Edward P. Temple, an experienced stage director from New York. Calling him a “veteran wizard of the stage,” Moore

¹⁰⁶ Mary Carr Moore, “Writing and Producing an Opera,” *Pacific Coast Musician* 4, no. 7 (July 1915): 51.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ For a more detailed discussion of Moore’s contact with Farwell, see Catherine Parsons Smith and Cynthia S. Richardson, “Mary Carr Moore and the American Music Movement,” *American Music Teacher* 38, no. 4 (February 1989): 16–19.

credited Temple with achieving “stage pictures [that] were so vivid and so real.”¹⁰⁹ Temple had begun his career as an actor in musical comedies, but had achieved greater fame as a Broadway stage director, best known for his work at the Shubert’s Hippodrome Theater.¹¹⁰ Through Temple’s connections, Moore was able to secure high-level professional singers for her lead roles. Charles Hargreaves sang the role of Marcus Whitman, having just completed a half-season performing smaller parts at the Metropolitan Opera. The title role went to Luella Chilson-Ohrman, a young soprano from Chicago who would later become a successful touring recitalist. Smaller roles were given to local professionals while the chorus was “made up of the pick of local amateur singers, all with fine voices and all heartily loyal to Mrs. Moore and to her work and devoted to the task of making it a great big success.”¹¹¹ Moore vigorously praised these supportive amateurs: “I have never seen a better trained chorus from a dramatic [stand]point than were the sixty-five talented young singers, all pupils of my friends the vocal teachers of Seattle.”¹¹²

Budgetary limitations, unfortunately, did not allow for the full compliment of orchestral musicians. Although scored for a standard orchestra with double winds and brass, Moore had to go without one oboe, one bassoon, and two of the three trombones. Moore recalled, “One can imagine how disappointing it was to the conductor, to miss these parts from the score.” “The conductor” to whom Moore refers is of course herself, but she did not originally intend to fill this role either. She recalled:

¹⁰⁹ Moore, “Writing and Producing an Opera,” 51.

¹¹⁰ “Edward P. Temple” [obituary], *New York Times*, 24 June 1921.

¹¹¹ Paul C. Hedrick, “Mrs. Moore’s Opera to Be Given This Evening,” *Seattle Times*, 22 April 1912.

¹¹² Moore, “Writing and Producing an Opera,” 51.

When the matter of conductor began to loom large upon the horizon, it assumed almost a tragic importance to me. Naturally, I wanted someone who would familiarize himself sufficiently with the score to carry the matter through successfully. Needless to say, we have many splendid musicians in the North, but of the few who were familiar with this branch of the profession, all were too busy to give the matter sufficient time. I had been conducting the chorus rehearsals for three months, and so it was finally decided that I must undertake the matter, since the funds available were not sufficient to procure a conductor from a distance. I almost died of terror before my first orchestral rehearsal; but the musicians ... were so courteous, so interested and apparently anxious to help me make a success of my venture, that I soon found I could rely upon their loyal support.¹¹³

Throughout the project, Moore was constantly finding herself forced to undertake tasks for which she felt unprepared—from composing an opera to organizing the premiere and taking the conductor’s podium. This experience would alter the trajectory of her compositional career, with opera making up the core of her later output. The magnitude of what Moore had begun did not go unnoticed. One critic praised the premiere as “an example of Western initiative and independence, to say nothing of its significance as an achievement in the sphere of womanhood.”¹¹⁴

Henry Hadley: *Azora*

Henry Hadley, among this group of composers, was especially suited to tackle the genre of opera. Equally adept at both composing and conducting, Hadley drew upon more up-to-date musical influences than many of his contemporaries. He was especially drawn to the music of Richard Strauss, with whom he first became acquainted in London in 1905. Hadley called Strauss’s *Salome* “the most wonderful and ravishing score of glowing color-sound that has ever been composed for the theater.” Strauss reciprocated the compliment by announcing that “Henry

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Anonymous commentary printed in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, n.d., quoted in Callahan, “Mary Carr Moore’s *Narcissa*,” 33.

Hadley is the only man over there who knows the orchestra.”¹¹⁵ Hadley’s circle of personal contacts early in his career also included the progressive composition teacher Ludwig Thuille in Munich, and the English impressionist Cyril Scott, whom he met in Paris in 1904. Hadley gained experience, unique for an American at this time, as an opera conductor in Europe, including a two-season tenure at the Mainz Stadttheater (1907–1909), which hosted the premiere production of his first opera, *Safié*, in 1909.¹¹⁶ Pauline MacArthur, one of Hadley’s contemporaries, clearly recognized the significance “for an American to conduct German opera in Germany and to become saturated with the traditions of Wagner, in the home of Wagner.”¹¹⁷ His colleague Frederick Converse knew that this was “just the sort of valuable experience that was so difficult, if not impossible to acquire in America at that time.”¹¹⁸ Upon his return to the states, Hadley led the Seattle Symphony from the fall of 1909 until 1911, when he accepted the directorship of the newly formed San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. While at San Francisco, Hadley pursued opera composition most assiduously, completing not only *Azora* (in 1914), but also a one-act opera (*Bianca*), incidental music of operatic proportions for a Grove Play (*The Atonement of Pan*, with text by Herbert’s librettist, Joseph Redding), and an operetta (*The Pearl Girl*).¹¹⁹

As might be expected, *Azora* faced the usual frustrations in finding an opera company willing to produce the premiere. Hadley first sent his score to the Metropolitan Opera in New

¹¹⁵ Quoted in John C. Canfield, “Henry Kimball Hadley: His Life and Works (1871–1937)” (Ed.D. diss., Florida State University, 1960), 82 and 80.

¹¹⁶ For more on Hadley’s conducting experience in Germany, see Herbert R. Boardman, *Henry Hadley: Amdassador of Harmony* (Atlanta, Ga.: Banner Press, 1932), 46–50. For a discussion of the production and reception of *Safié*, see Canfield, “Henry Kimball Hadley,” 88–93.

¹¹⁷ Pauline Arnoux MacArthur, “Henry Hadley’s Place in American Music,” *Musical America* 35, no. 1 (29 October 1921): 21.

¹¹⁸ Frederick S. Converse, “Henry Hadley,” in *Commemorative Tributes* (New York: American Academy of Arts and Letters, 1939), 78.

¹¹⁹ Regarding Hadley’s operatic productivity while at San Francisco, see Canfield, “Henry Kimball Hadley,” 129. This conducting post made Hadley the “the highest paid orchestral conductor in the United States” (*ibid.*, 115).

York for consideration. The composer recalled, “After about a year of waiting, I called at the Metropolitan and after much hunting around, my orchestra score was discovered in some corner, with an accumulation of dust.”¹²⁰ His next instinct was to commission an Italian translation of the libretto and aim for a production in Buenos Aires, but what happened next, if Hadley is to be believed, defies all explanation. A certain painter friend of Hadley’s had recently experienced a sudden improvement in his artistic fortunes after some sort of “celebrated numerologist” instructed him to change his name. Hadley decided to make a visit of his own, despite being “somewhat skeptical about the whole matter.” The painter friend made an appointment for Hadley, without revealing his real name or profession; Hadley went to the appointment claiming to be a landscape painter. Somehow, the numerologist—“a kindly woman of middle age”—was able to discern that her client was in fact a composer. Determining the letter Z to be of favorable fortune, Hadley found her ultimate insight to be, “to say the least, a bit uncanny.” Hadley recalled her words:

You have written an opera. I do not know the name of your opera but one thing I can see clearly—that there is a Z in it, which is extremely good. The first letter appears to be I. [...] You will never hear your opera unless you change the letter I to A, in which case it will be immediately accepted and you will within a few months conduct in two cities.

In fact, the opera’s original title was “Izora,” and after “passing a night wondering if my mind was becoming affected,” Hadley got permission from his bemused librettist, David Stevens, to change the name to “Azora.” It suddenly occurred to Hadley that his opera must be sent not to Buenos Aires but instead to Cleofante Campanini of the Chicago Opera Company. A week later, Hadley heard back from Campanini: he both accepted the opera and wanted Hadley to come and

¹²⁰ Hadley quoted in Boardman, *Henry Hadley*, 79.

conduct it himself. Years later Hadley explained, “I tell the story for what it is worth, but it still remains one of the unusual experiences of my life.”¹²¹

Hadley’s collaborator, David Kilburn Stevens, is the closest thing to a professional librettist among this group of six. Although originally trained as a lawyer, he left the practice of law to join a music-publishing firm where he first worked on English translations of European operas. Through his music-business contacts, he found himself in demand as a lyricist and was soon providing texts for stage works and other vocal music by Hadley, George Whitefield Chadwick, Victor Herbert, and Louis Coerne, among others. His work on *Azora* marked his second full-fledged opera libretto and only his first opera project to reach the stage, having previously written primarily for comic operas and operettas.¹²²

While progress on the production and rehearsals went smoothly during late 1917, the press seemed to reflect some confusion about when the premiere would actually take place. The *Chicago Tribune* originally announced it for Wednesday, December 19, but soon the premiere moved one night earlier, to Tuesday, December 18. By the day of the dress rehearsal, Arthur Middleton, singing the principal baritone role, had come down with a cold, thus forcing the postponement of the premiere until the day after Christmas, an altogether more auspicious date than a Tuesday night.¹²³ Exactly one month after the premiere, the Chicago Opera Company introduced the work to New York City while on tour.

¹²¹ Hadley’s retelling of the entire episode, from which these quotes are taken, is included in Boardman, *Henry Hadley*, 79–82.

¹²² For a brief biographical sketch on Stevens, see Albert Nelson Marquis, ed., *Who’s Who in New England*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: A. N. Marquis & Company, 1916), 1019. Steven’s other collaborations with Hadley included the operetta *The Fire Prince* and a large scale choral and orchestral cantata called *The Golden Prince*. For Converse, Stevens provided numerous texts for art songs in addition to the libretto for the unproduced *The Padrone* and a children’s opera called *Love’s Sacrifice*. Stevens also provided operetta lyrics for Herbert’s *The Madcap Duchess* and Coerne’s *The Bells of Beaujolais*.

¹²³ F. D. [Frederick Donaghey], “About Music,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 December 1917; “The Opera,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 December 1917; and Frederick Donaghey, “Hadley’s Opera Postponed,” *Chicago Daily*

The national press hyped the “All-American” makeup of the production. The magazine *Current Opinion*, for instance, provided readers with this description of *Azora*:

An American opera, on an American subject, the text and the music written by Americans, performed by Americans, with scenery designed by an American.... The event signalizes an epoch in American musical annals, for it is the first time ... that an all-American product has ‘gone across’ an American grand-opera stage.¹²⁴

Count them—the description includes eight instances of “American” (plus two more in the article’s title and subheading). Yet in context, there is something ironic about this hyperbole. First, the only real distinction between this production and its predecessors is the fact that none of the principal roles were portrayed by singers of foreign birth. The story too is more symbolically American than distinctively so. The plot is essentially that of *Aida* transplanted to Aztec Mexico with an added veneer of the need for pagan worshipers to accept Christianity. (The nuances of Moore and Carr’s Indian-missionary conflict play no role here.) Not until the arrival of Cortez and his Christian soldiers in the ultimate scene do the symbolic representatives of American progress finally appear on stage. However, with the United States’ increasing involvement in the First World War, shifting perceptions about European-derived art genres required that the American origins of this project take on a much greater significance. Here, the Americanist undercurrent merely implied in earlier commentary at last reveals itself explicitly.

Charles Wakefield Cadman: *Shanewis*

With Cadman’s *Shanewis*, audiences in 1918 finally witnessed an American opera with an indigenous plot set in their present day. The premise is loosely derived from Indian soprano

Tribune, 18 December 1917. Note that the piano-vocal score, published in the weeks leading up to the premiere, prints the originally scheduled date of 18 December and not the actual premiere date of 26 December.

¹²⁴ “The First Genuinely All-American Operatic Production: *Azora* ... Arouses Patriotic Enthusiasm for American Opera,” *Current Opinion* 64, no. 2 (February 1918): 103.

Tsianina Redfeather's real-life background, a connection perhaps inscribed in the opera's title. Cadman scholar Harry Perison suggests that the name "Shanewis" is in fact "a phonetic approximation" of Tsianina. Thus from Tsianina, pronounced "cha-NEE-na," Cadman and Eberhart may have crafted the name Shanewis, pronounced "sha-NEE-wis."¹²⁵ A brief remark on the opera's title is also in order. The published piano-vocal score gives the work's full title as *The Robin Woman (Shanewis): An American Opera (In One Act)*. The published libretto reverses this, with the title appearing as *Shanewis (The Robin Woman): An Opera*. Both appeared in 1918. Newspaper reviews from the period use the two titles interchangeably. Cadman and Eberhart's original title was in fact *The Robin Woman*, but when Gatti-Casazza accepted the work for the Met, he disliked the title and proposed instead that the work be called *The Indian*. As a compromise, the name of the lead character was ultimately selected for a title, retaining the original idea as a subtitle.¹²⁶

Cadman's real-world "Robin Woman"—Tsianina's name actually means "Wildflower"—was raised on an Oklahoma Indian reservation, but because of her emerging musical talent she moved to Denver where she received her professional voice training from that city's most prominent vocal instructor, John C. Wilcox. Wilcox arranged an introduction to Cadman, who soon realized that Tsianina was just what his Indian Music Talks were missing—an actual Indian to perform his "idealizations" of Indian melodies with the composer at the piano. Thus Cadman and "Princess Tsianina," as she was billed, toured the country entertaining

¹²⁵ Harry D. Perison, "Charles Wakefield Cadman: His Life and Works" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1978), 181. Curiously enough, Cadman's first ever song collaboration with Eberhart also featured a female Indian protagonist named "Shanewis." See Charles Wakefield Cadman, "Opportunities for the American Composer," *The Etude* 61 (November 1943): 748.

¹²⁶ Re-titling information taken from Perison, "Charles Wakefield Cadman," 190.

and informing audiences of the beauty of Indian music. Together they gave nearly 400 joint concerts between 1913 and 1926.¹²⁷

The precise origin of the idea for an opera based on Tsianina's life remains unclear. The singer herself remembered, "I had given [the story] to Mr. Cadman, based on incidents of my own life."¹²⁸ Cadman's friend Lulu Sanford-Tefft recalled that the idea for the opera came up during an after-party conversation between Tsianina, Cadman and Eberhart.¹²⁹ The librettist likewise noted in the published score, "The sketch of the story was given by Tsianina Redfeather of the Creek tribe."¹³⁰ Perison's research instead offers a different version of events, explaining that Tsianina's voice teacher originally suggested the idea. Wilcox along with others of Tsianina's Denver supporters encouraged him to compose "an opera based on the life of Tsianina."¹³¹

There was never any doubt that Nelle Richmond Eberhart would provide the opera's libretto. Eberhart was a close personal friend and had been Cadman's collaborator since the beginning of his compositional career. At first, simple chance brought the pairing together. Eberhart and Cadman just happened to be neighbors in Pittsburgh—quite a coincidence when

¹²⁷ For more on this period of Tsianina's career, see her autobiography: Tsianina Blackstone, *Where Trails Have Led Me*, 2nd ed. (Santa Fe, N.M.: Vergara Printing Co., 1970), 23ff. She includes a representative program from one of Cadman's Indian Music Talks on 32–3. Also see A. Dean Palmer, "Tsianina Blackstone: A Chapter in the History of the American Indian in Opera," *Liberal Arts Review* 7 (March 1979): 40–64.

¹²⁸ Blackstone, *Where Trails Have Led Me*, 123.

¹²⁹ Lulu Sanford-Tefft, *Little Intimate Stories of Charles Wakefield Cadman* (Hollywood: David Graham Fischer Corp., 1926), 34–5. Regarding the origin of the idea, Sanford-Tefft laconically states, "Many great things begin by mere chance." Cadman, in a brief foreword, claims to "heartily subscribe to the accuracy of these stories" (5).

¹³⁰ Nelle Richmond Eberhart, "Argument," in Charles Wakefield Cadman, *The Robin Woman (Shanewis): An American Opera* (Boston: White-Smith Music Publishing Co., 1918), 5.

¹³¹ Perison, "Charles Wakefield Cadman," 179. For an additional discussion of the origins of the *Shanewis* project, see Arlouine G. Wu, *Constance Eberhart: A Musical Career in the Age of Cadman*, National Opera Association Monographs Series 4 (Oxford, Miss.: National Opera Association, 1983), 35–7. Constance Eberhart, a professional vocalist, was librettist Nelle's daughter and a significant proponent of Cadman's compositions.

one considers that they would become two of the most passionate proponents of Indianist compositions. Eberhart could trace her interest in all things Indian back to her early life. As Hipsher notes, her “sympathetic delineation of Indian character and psychology is but the reflex of her youth spent in the atmosphere of the reservations of Nebraska.”¹³² Tsianina offered this recollection:

[As] a former school teacher on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in Nebraska [she] had studied Indian lore and caught the heartbeat of her red Brother’s poetic nature. ... When she learned that Cadman was a composer, she asked him if he had ever thought of writing Indian music. She was so enthusiastic over America’s own Indian heritage that thereupon were born two real friends of Indian lore.”¹³³

Thus, friendship with Eberhart provided the impetus for Cadman’s first settings of Indian melodies. After having won a \$100 prize from a choral composition competition, Cadman chose to fund his first visit to a reservation in order to hear the music for himself. He attended a powwow in Omaha, a setting that later finds its way into *Shanewis*.¹³⁴ By the time of the *Shanewis* project, they had already worked together for a decade, collaborating on art songs and one previous unperformed opera, *Daoma*.

With World War I underway, Tsianina interrupted her regular concertizing with Cadman and began performing for the Allied troops in England, France and Germany. Cadman, meanwhile, began work on the opera. He made rapid progress, completing the work in just over four months. Begun in April 1917, *Shanewis* was finished in piano score by June and orchestrated by the middle of August.¹³⁵ The opera borrows only its initial premise from “the life

¹³² Hipsher, *American Opera*, 102.

¹³³ Tsianina, *Where Trails Have Led Me*, 46.

¹³⁴ See Wu, *Constance Eberhart*, 19.

¹³⁵ This chronology was pieced together from Blackstone, *Where Trails Have Led Me*, 87–105; Perison, “Charles Wakefield Cadman,” 188–9; and Wu, *Constance Eberhart*, 38.

of Tsianina.” Eberhart locates the setting of the opera’s first half at a picturesque seaside California location, rather than the factual Denver, thus making that state a setting in three of the six operas examined here. One should avoid making too much of this coincidence. Redding picked California because he lived there. Converse’s reassignment of Wise’s original Mexican location to California is inconsequential in terms of how the plot itself unfolds—it is simply stated once in the published score—although both composers do take advantage of the opportunity for local color that the racial mixture of California provided. Cadman too was living in California while working on *Shanewis*, hence this is again a hometown selection. Aside from the fact that the ocean is visible at the rear of the set, the location is otherwise generic. Far more significant is the fact that five of the six operas are set in the Western United States. (*Azora* is the only exception.) This issue will be addressed in the following chapter.

The opera’s opening scene shows Shanewis, who like the real-life Tsianina is a professionally trained Indian soprano, performing two songs for a private *soirée musicale* at the home of her patroness, Mrs. Everton. Shanewis’s diegetic songs—“The Spring Song of the Robin Woman” and “The Ojibwa Canoe Song”—provide two newly composed examples of Cadman’s idealized Indian melodies with which Tsianina first earned her fame. A proxy for the composer himself makes an appearance here: Shanewis is accompanied by an onstage pianist. Here the similarities with Tsianina’s actual life end. The opera’s tragic conclusion comes solely out of Cadman’s desire for the opportunity to compose “BIG MUSIC and dramatic music” for “a plot that will be grand operish! [*sic*]” Cadman reminded Eberhart that her plot need not “be consonant with Tsianina’s own character.” He continued:

I have never at any time associated this plot ... with her life story save ONLY the opening which is that drawing room scene and the fact of her having a “benefactress.”

Outside these two TRUE events I had pictured the whole plot in the nature of a tragedy or melodrama such as one thinks of and associates with the grand opera stage.¹³⁶

The opera's conclusion—Philip Harjo's sudden murder of Lionel with a poisoned arrow, and Lionel drawing his final breaths in the arms of Shanewis—is surely as melodramatic as Cadman could have wished.

World War I, as we have seen in the previous chapter, encouraged the Metropolitan Opera to seek out new American works. As Arlouine Wu explains, The Met “must have been aware of Charles' potential drawing power (certainly enough of their singers constantly performed his songs on their concerts,) and dropped him a hint that they might be interested in his next opera.”¹³⁷ While there is some debate over just how enthusiastically the Met pursued Cadman—*Shanewis* would be, after all, the first produced opera by a composer known primarily for his popular Indian ballads for voice and piano and not for large-scale compositions—the opera was soon added to the Met's lineup for a 1918 premiere.¹³⁸ Harry Perison revealed that the management was not entirely convinced of the work's merit and apparently accepted the opera for performance before actually seeing the full score.¹³⁹ Carolyn Guzski suggests that perhaps Gatti-Casazza simply did not like Indianist opera. He had already declined to produce *Natoma*, *Poia*, and *The Sacrifice* and would later turn down Bimboni's *Winona*, despite the lobbying of President Harding himself.¹⁴⁰ Regardless of the internal circumstances, *Shanewis* was accepted

¹³⁶ Letter from Cadman to Eberhart, 1 March 1917; quoted in Perison, “Charles Wakefield Cadman,” 180–1.

¹³⁷ Wu, *Constance Eberhart*, 37.

¹³⁸ For an early press announcement of the upcoming premiere, see “Works by Americans for Metropolitan Opera,” *New York Times*, 23 September 1917.

¹³⁹ Perison, “Charles Wakefield Cadman,” 189–90. Wu, *Constance Eberhart*, 43–4, is suspicious that Gatti-Casazza's support of American works was somewhat disingenuous.

¹⁴⁰ Carolyn Guzski, “American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910–1935: A Contextual History and Critical Survey of Selected Works” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2001), 273–4 and 279–81.

and Eberhart could scarcely contain her nervous enthusiasm: “I was sure we would drop dead, or the Met Opera House would burn down, or New York City would be submerged by a tidal wave before that unbelievable event could occur—a performance of our opera by the great Metropolitan.”¹⁴¹

A wide range of factors aligned in Cadman’s favor and provided an opening for *Shanewis*. In addition to the period’s anti-German and pro-American bias, one of the Met’s conductors who had previously rejected Cadman’s earlier opera had recently been fired. More significantly, Henry Gilbert’s ballet, *The Dance in Place Congo*, set in New Orleans, had already been accepted and was in need of a companion piece.¹⁴² Ultimately, these works would be coupled with Franco Leoni’s *L’Oracolo*—an Italian verismo score but set in San Francisco’s Chinatown—creating a triple bill with three different American settings and representing four different American ethnicities. The official Met chronicler Irving Kolodin rather cynically remarked that while the acceptance of these two new works “might seem a concomitant of the patriotic fervor of the moment, [this] was actually a result of [their] brevity.” In a subsequent, updated edition of his Met history, Kolodin dropped this comment and instead rather tactlessly described the triple bill as “a prismatic sequence of red man, black man, and yellow man.”¹⁴³

Cadman, Eberhart and Tsianina were all directly involved at the Met in the preparations and rehearsals leading up to the opera’s premiere. As Lulu Sanford-Tefft recalled, Tsianina, in particular, “was greatly in demand” since she was needed “to help with the Indian phases of the

¹⁴¹ Eberhart quoted in Wu, *Constance Eberhart*, 39.

¹⁴² For more on these and other factors leading up to *Shanewis*’s acceptance at the Met, see Guzski, “American Opera at the Metropolitan,” 282.

¹⁴³ But the writer had surely not witnessed a performance of this production. See Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 244; and *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1966: A Candid History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 273.

opera.”¹⁴⁴ Stage design for the opera’s second half, the Oklahoma powwow, was provided by Norman Bel Geddes and his wife.¹⁴⁵ They had previously written and produced an Indian play called *Thunderbird* for which Cadman supplied incidental music. Their design was notable for its realism; the Geddeses were keen to capture the atmosphere of the open plains and the specific characteristics of the Plains Tribes. One reviewer praised their design’s “feeling of limitless open-air, of vastness and mystery, of mirage that is part of the true Western landscape” and “the realistic details of tents or tepees with open smoke flaps, of lemonade and peanut stands gay with American bunting, of a ramshackle prairie wagon.”¹⁴⁶ *Shanewis* marked Bel Geddes’s debut at the Met. American singers would portray all of the opera’s lead roles. A young mezzo-soprano named Alice Gentle was brought in specifically to create *Shanewis*, having impressed the New York public in a recent Carnegie Hall debut recital.¹⁴⁷ Unfortunately, just two days before the premiere, Gentle contracted influenza (in the midst of the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic) and was unable to perform. Thus, Sophie Braslau, another young American, found herself presented with a career changing opportunity. She had been singing small roles at the Met since 1913, but this was her first chance to create the title role in a world premiere. With Tsianina’s coaching, she successfully learned the part and embodied the character so well, that, “by odd coincidence,

¹⁴⁴ Sanford-Tefft, *Little Intimate Stories of Charles Wakefield Cadman*, 33.

¹⁴⁵ For an interview with Bel Geddes regarding his work on *Shanewis*, see “Staging the Indian Scene in *Shanewis*,” *New York Times*, 17 February 1918. One of their design drawings accompanies “Native *Shanewis* and *Place Congo* Soon to Be Seen,” *New York Times*, 10 March 1918.

¹⁴⁶ “*Shanewis*, Indian Opera, Captivates,” *New York Times*, 24 March 1918. Elise Kirk reproduces one photo of the powwow set in *American Opera*, 167. The Met Opera Archive online shares an image of Sophie Braslau in costume as *Shanewis*; see <<http://archives.metoperafamily.org/Images/BraslauShanewis.jpg>>.

¹⁴⁷ “Alice Gentle in *Shanewis*,” *New York Times*, 24 February 1918; and “Native *Shanewis* and *Place Congo* Soon to be Seen,” *New York Times*, 10 March 1918.

Tsianina ... walked down an aisle during intermission and was promptly mistaken for the star.”¹⁴⁸

Because of its plot and setting, Cadman’s opera forms a sort of exception among this group. Its present-day period and its glimpse into life on a modern reservation avoid what Tara Browner terms “the dominant society’s preoccupation with historic Indians of the past.”¹⁴⁹ The other five operas under consideration here obviously share such a preoccupation. By avoiding an historical plot, Cadman suggests that opera can be just as national by examining the American present rather than the nation’s past. This is a strikingly modern idea. If the other operas discussed here adhere more closely to an inherited nineteenth-century aesthetic in terms of plot and setting, Cadman instead points in a veristic direction. Only in *Shanewis* did audiences encounter operatic characters who were people like them. These characters wear modern dress, live in a regular house (scene one), and attend a powwow on a reservation (scene two) just like anyone in the audience might do. Cadman proudly described the work as depicting “a phase of present-day American life.”¹⁵⁰

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Having thus treated each opera individually, it is worth further enumerating the broad range of connections, personal and professional, that unite this group of composers, especially

¹⁴⁸ “*Shanewis*, Indian Opera, Captivates,” *New York Times*, 24 March 1918.

¹⁴⁹ Tara Browner, “Transposing Cultures: The Appropriation of Native North American Musics, 1890–1990” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995), 11.

¹⁵⁰ “Foreword” to Cadman, *The Robin Woman*, 3.

since they were not immediately apparent to later commentators. Writing in 1935, Olin Downes advanced this curious observation:

American [opera] composers as a class have not been able to profit by the lesson that [earlier works] could have taught them. It is not surprising that this is the case, since ... the native composers, scattered over the whole country, have had little opportunity ... to learn from the achievements and mistakes of their predecessors.¹⁵¹

The historical record, on the other hand, reveals a very different picture. The interconnections among the six composers considered in this study suggest that they were in fact well aware of at least some portion of each other's work and were thus surely able "to learn from the achievements and mistakes" of their colleagues. While geographic distribution and a cross-generational divide prevented these composers from becoming an opera-focused American version of "Les Six," mutual influences and shared artistic objectives do align them in some sort of group. Perhaps the less-than-cohesive "New German School" is a closer parallel. National press coverage, especially in the widely distributed trade magazines like *Musical America*, and the easy accessibility of published piano-vocal scores enabled the group to remain fully informed of their colleagues' progress. Even if no composer can claim the place of a central figure or guiding influence, the matrix of shared and overlapping connections between individual members suggests that these composers could indeed be seen to represent the core of an emergent school of American national opera.

Since *Poia* is the earliest opera of this collection, one can begin to trace this web of connections with Arthur Nevin. This score had the most direct impact on Charles Wakefield Cadman, composer of the latest opera in my selection. Cadman could likely have attended *Poia*'s unstaged 1907 performance in Pittsburgh. Nevin and McClintock's lecture-demonstration of

¹⁵¹ Olin Downes, "Operas and Librettos: Failures and Successes among Sixteen Native Works Produced by Gatti," *New York Times*, 3 February 1935.

Poia excerpts presented before President Roosevelt at the White House is a possible model for Cadman's own Indian Music talks, which did in fact include examples drawn from *Poia*.

Cadman himself remembered that a key inspiration in his own decision to become a composer were the operettas of Victor Herbert. Cadman, like Nevin, also encountered Herbert during the latter's tenure as conductor of the Pittsburgh Orchestra. The influence may have been mutual: chapter five will illustrate the stylistic link between Cadman's idealization models and the Indian music in Herbert's *Natoma*. Furthermore, Herbert regularly conducted his own arrangement of Cadman's "From the Land of the Sky-Blue Waters," a song that may have been directly inspired by Cadman's encounter with *Poia*.¹⁵²

Herbert's connection to Henry Hadley is even closer, as he occupied the role of a mentor to the younger Hadley during the late 1890s and early 1900s. John Canfield explains, "It was Herbert who first stimulated Hadley to attempt a symphony, and his readiness to perform all that Hadley could produce was a great inspiration to the young composer."¹⁵³ Herbert's regular repertoire as conductor included Hadley's Second Symphony. Later in Hadley's career, as an established conductor and an ardent champion of American composers, he led works by both Herbert and Frederick Converse. Following Herbert's death, Hadley was called upon to cover his friend's already scheduled conducting engagements. Elsewhere, in their role as boosters of national music, both Hadley and Cadman served on the board of the "Congress for the Encouragement of American Music," the organization which presented Horatio Parker's

¹⁵² These connections have been compiled from the following sources: Guzski, "American Opera at the Metropolitan," 277; Perison, "Charles Wakefield Cadman," 80–1; Cadman, "Opportunities for the American Composer," 705; Miller, "Victor Herbert's *Natoma*," 63–4; Claire Lee Purdy, *Victor Herbert: American Music-Master* (New York: Julian Messner, 1944), 214; and Michael V. Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 267. For a discussion of Herbert's conducting work in Pittsburgh, see Robert F. Schmalz, "Paur and the Pittsburgh: Requiem for an Orchestra," *American Music* 12 (1994): 125–8 and 142.

¹⁵³ See Canfield, "Henry Kimball Hadley," 57–61, quote from 57; also see Boardman, *Henry Hadley*, 37–40.

Fairyland as a prizewinning opera in 1915. When Hadley died in 1937, Converse authored the official memorial tribute.¹⁵⁴ Only Mary Carr Moore remained relatively isolated from this scene until later in her career. Friendship with Cadman would not come until years later, when both were residents of Los Angeles. During the 1910s, Arthur Farwell remained her most viable link to the American new music scene.¹⁵⁵ Yet taken in total, and despite being “scattered over the whole country,” to return to Olin Downes’s description, isolation seems not to have hindered the operatic progress of any of these composers.

If there is one common thread uniting the six librettists, it is their overall inexperience. They were often playing at the opera game for the first time in their careers. Of the six librettists discussed here (see Table 2.2 below), only Sarah Pratt Carr was a professional writer at the time. She primarily wrote novels for a juvenile female readership; her only librettos were for her daughter Mary Carr Moore. Nelle Richmond Eberhart, a wealthy socialite, wrote song lyrics and librettos almost exclusively for Cadman. Randolph Hartley was a press agent and manager of theater stars, while Joseph Redding was a prominent California lawyer and amateur composer. David Stevens had only seen his operetta texts make it to the stage before he wrote *Azora*. The level of experienced libretto writers that European contemporaries like Massenet, Strauss or Puccini could count on simply did not exist in the United States. Opera remained too new of an artistic venture for the country to have yet produced an American Hofmannsthal or a team like

¹⁵⁴ These connections have been compiled from the following sources: Purdy, *Victor Herbert*, 157; Susan Feder, “Making American Music: Henry Hadley and the Manhattan Symphony Orchestra,” in *A Celebration of American Music: Works and Music in Honor of H. Wiley Hitchcock*, ed. Richard Crawford, R. Allen Lott and Carol J. Oja (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 365; Kaye, *Victor Herbert*, 253; Perison, “Charles Wakefield Cadman,” 162; and Converse, “Henry Hadley,” in *Commemorative Tributes*, 73–82. For a full list of the American works conducted by Hadley during his tenure with orchestras in New York, Seattle and San Francisco, see Boardman, *Henry Hadley*, 168–71.

¹⁵⁵ For information on Moore’s later contact with Cadman, see Smith and Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore*, 175; and Smith and Richardson, “Mary Carr More and the American Music Movement,” 19.

Illica and Giacosa. This generalized librettist inexperience surely encouraged the kinds of anti-libretto criticism to be explored the following chapter.

Even if they struggled to devise suitable operatic sung texts, one can palpably sense the enthusiasm with which they approached their task. As a group, they consistently sought out American subject matter and often found it right in their own backyards, so to speak. Redding and Carr drew their inspiration from the history of their own home states, Hartley spent parts of his youth in the same undeveloped American landscape that situates his opera text, while Eberhart's libretto continues to develop her life-long love of all things Indian. Although these librettists did not interact with each other to the same extent that their composer-colleagues did, their shared sense of purpose would suggest that this group, along with their other contemporaries, should indeed be considered the nation's first school of opera librettists.

From these separate case studies, several additional themes emerge that can help to explain the path of an American opera to the stage. Despite the diverse backgrounds of these composers and librettists—summarized in the two tables below—most creators involved had a personal connection to the project at hand. Many were treating American settings in which they had either lived or extensively visited. With a completed work in hand, composers were indeed able to secure performance outlets, but their efforts were often frustrated by delays. The Berlin Opera took over a year to accept *Poia*, Hadley's *Azora* sat forgotten on a shelf at the Met, and *Natoma* was at first the victim of an inter-company feud. Converse and Moore were instead able to arrange local, hometown premieres, while a unique set of circumstances sped the progress of *Shanewis* along. Whether it came about through careful planning or fortuitous coincidences, the operas that followed the smoothest paths were the ones which filled a specific need at a specific venue. Ultimately, an opera's potential was bound up with the persistence and dedication of its

creators. These six examples illustrate that belief in one’s work in the face of challenges always resulted in an eventual staging. The doors of this nation’s opera houses were clearly not closed to the American composer. As the final chapter will explain, once accepted for performance, a new American opera found an eager and expectant audiences.

Table 2.1. Summary List of Composers

OPERA	COMPOSER	MUSICAL TRAINING
<i>Poia</i>	Arthur Nevin	first guidance from his father (an early biographer of Stephen Foster) and brother (the more famous Ethelbert Nevin), study in Europe with Humperdinck
<i>Natoma</i>	Victor Herbert	originally trained as a cellist, came to U.S. in 1886 as principal cellist of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra under Seidl, also active as a conductor
<i>The Sacrifice</i>	Frederick S. Converse	study at Harvard under J. K. Paine, later private study with Chadwick, then diploma from Royal Academy of Music in Munich under Rheinberger
<i>Narcissa</i>	Mary Carr Moore	no European training, composition study in San Francisco with John Harraden Pratt (her uncle), also trained as a soprano, sang the lead role in her first stage work (<i>The Oracle</i> , an operetta), regularly conducted performances of her own operas
<i>Azora</i>	Henry Hadley	study at New England Conservatory with Chadwick, European study with Eusebius Mandyczewski and Ludwig Thuille, experience as opera conductor in Germany before returning to the United States
<i>Shanewis</i>	Charles Wakefield Cadman	no European study; brief periods of piano, organ and voice study with local Pittsburgh musicians; theory lessons with Leo Oehmler but no other formal training; Cadman considered himself “practically self-taught” ¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ See Perison, “Charles Wakefield Cadman,” 30.

Table 2.2. Summary List of Librettists

OPERA	LIBRETTIST	CAREER
<i>Poia</i>	Randolph Hartley	press agent and manager for theater stars
<i>Natoma</i>	Joseph D. Redding	prominent California corporate lawyer, arts patron, himself an opera composer (<i>Fay-Yen-Fah</i> , first American opera to be produced in France, 1925)
<i>The Sacrifice</i>	Frederick S. Converse	libretto by the composer but with some additional versified lyrics by poet John Macy
<i>Narcissa</i>	Sarah Pratt Carr	Unitarian minister, author of novels primarily for a juvenile female readership, only wrote librettos for her daughter's use
<i>Azora</i>	David Kilburn Stevens	trained as a lawyer but worked in the music publishing industry, wrote English translations of foreign operas, authored original librettos and lyrics for many American composers
<i>Shanewis</i>	Nelle Richmond Eberhart	wealthy socialite, trained as a schoolteacher, Cadman's regular collaborator for opera librettos and song lyrics

The Burden of Expectations

Enthusiastic and oftentimes over-zealous press coverage posed one final challenge consistently faced by all six operas in the days leading up to each premiere. Of course, one would expect the premiere of a new American opera to be heralded as a “major event” in the nation’s cultural life. As we have seen throughout this chapter, the press eagerly followed the progress of each work, interviewing the involved parties and reporting on production advances and delays. Preview articles regularly provided full synopses to help prepare readers for the upcoming new works. Some writers went so far as to provide readers with detailed musical analysis and even notated music examples. Illustrations included photographs of the composers, librettists, cast members, and the occasional reproductions of stage design drawings. The most

elaborate press coverage presented full- or half-page spreads, clearly intended to attract the reader's attention. (See the illustrations at the end of this chapter for two especially vivid example reports on *Natoma* from the *New York Times*. Although both images come from the same source, similar articles appeared across a wide range of newspapers, covering all six operas discussed here.) The reporting on each work was so thorough that even readers without an interest in the genre could not help but be aware of the significant musical event about to take place in their city.

This coverage helped to raise the profile of the premieres and build audience interest. A growing sense of anticipation surely did not hinder the fortunes of a new opera. The trouble, however, came in the form of over-hyped pronouncements as to the quality of the upcoming work. Press writers were ever eager to claim that the new scores marked a significant "first" of some kind, or that they would forever change the genre of opera in this country. They seemed to issue such pronouncements without hesitation, even before an opera had been seen or heard. The following array of examples illustrates the press's indulgence in such hyperbole. The excerpts are selected from the coverage of *Poia*, *Natoma*, *The Sacrifice*, and *Narcissa*, and appear in chronological order. Key phrases appear in boldface.

"American musicians in Germany are rejoicing over the decision of the management of the Kaiser's Royal Opera in Berlin to produce the American Indian opera *Poia* The acceptance of this piece is **an epoch-making event** because it marks the first substantial recognition ever accorded to transatlantic composers in the land where Beethoven and Wagner were born. ... *Poia* promises to result in a revision of the Teuton critics' views."

—"Nevin's Work Taken for Kaiser's Opera"
New York Times, 20 June 1909

“[Poia’s] production early in the new year promises to be **one of the events** of contemporary music in the history of Berlin.”

—“Attack American Opera”
New York Times, 5 December 1909

“[Poia signals] **an epoch in American musical history**..., the first recognition of importance granted by musical Europe to America. ... [I]t now stands as authentic history that an American has written a great, if not the great, American opera.”

—“Berlin Welcomes the First Serious American Opera”
New York Times, 10 April 1910

“[Natoma is] **the first** strictly American grand opera ever staged....”

—“Music and the Drama”
Chicago Daily Tribune, 24 February 1911

“[Regarding *Natoma*] it must be said, almost unreservedly, that **never before** has an American work been produced under such brilliant auspices or had so many chances to make a success.”

—“*Natoma*, Newest American Grand Opera”
New York Times, 26 February 1911

“**The most interesting event** of the season at the Boston opera house [will be *The Sacrifice*]... Music lovers of the entire country are looking forward with interest to the production of this new work as Mr. Converse stands foremost among American composers.”

—“Converse’s New Opera”
Boston Globe, 20 February 1911

“[*The Sacrifice*] is regarded as **the most notable endeavor** in the field of grand opera attempted by an American musician”

—“Noted Tenor to Sing in *Lakme*”
Boston Globe, 1 March 1911

“Friday night [when *The Sacrifice* premieres] will be **the most important date** in American musical history. ... [I]t is **the beginning of real American opera** and it means everything. I look to see it become international and have a place in the repertoire of every big opera company as much as any opera of Verdi or Puccini.”

—Interview with soprano Alice Nielsen
“Boston Tomorrow Hears New Opera”
Boston Globe, 2 March 1911

“‘The Seattle Spirit’—whatever that is—has never found a place in the music life of Seattle ... and now that the opportunity is afforded to redeem a bad reputation and with **so big a thing as a grand opera premiere** [*Narcissa*], it is up to everyone to do his part.”

—newspaper commentary by F. Boyd Wells
The Town Crier, 6 January 1912¹⁵⁷

“What all reasonably-minded people must admit can be dignified as **an epoch-making event** will be the first production of *Narcissa* at the Moore Theater tonight.”

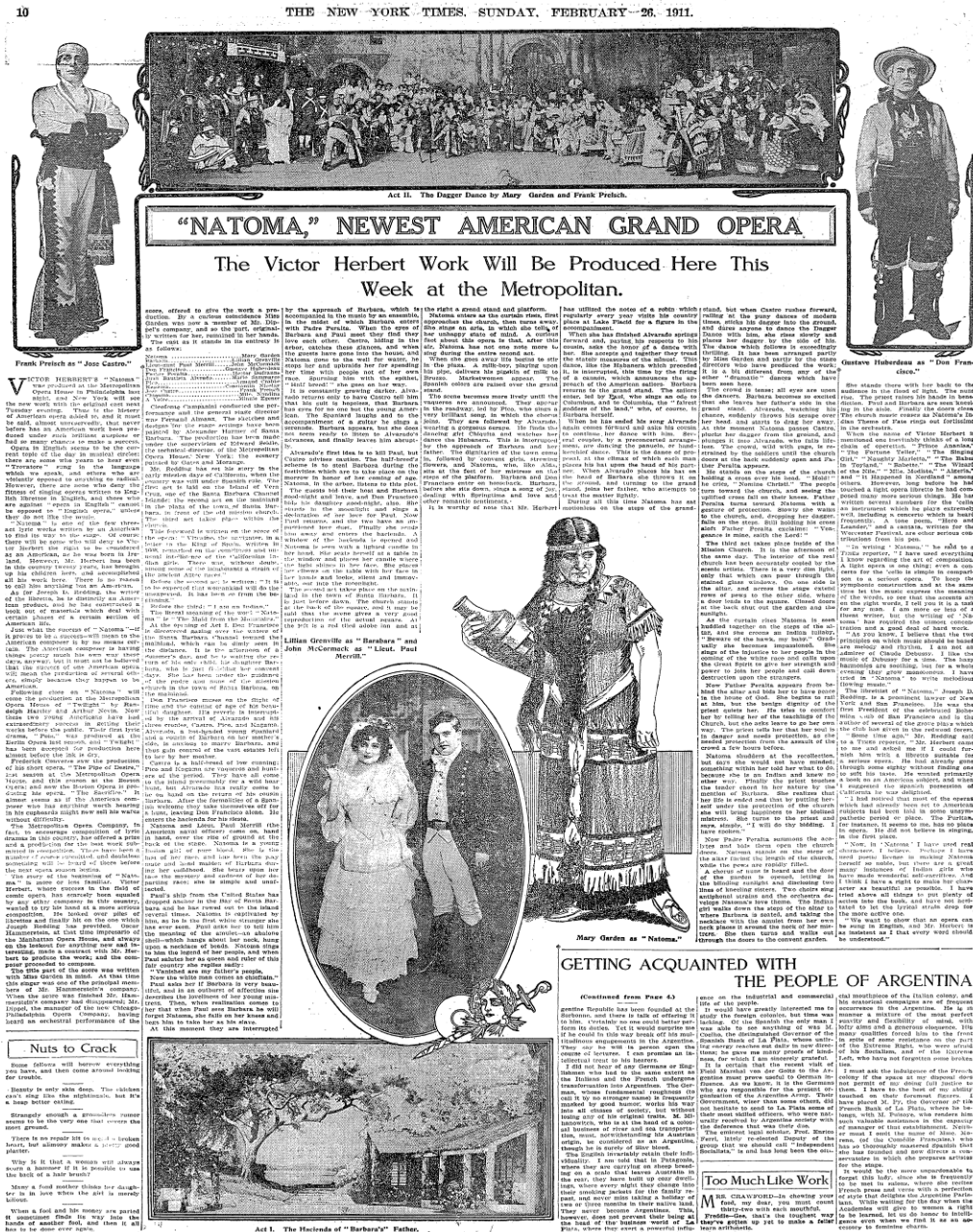
—Paul C. Hedrick, “Mrs. Moore’s Opera to Be Given This Evening”
Seattle Times, 22 April 1912

The burden of expectations was indeed a heavy one. In no way could these often first-attempts at grand opera be expected to rise to the level of quality that the press had promised. With the bar set so high, even the slightest disappointment grew in proportional magnitude, as their subsequent reception makes clear.¹⁵⁸ By the end of the decade, newspaper writers had learned to approach the subject of American opera more cautiously. While both *Azora* and *Shanewis* still received equally detailed press coverage in the weeks leading up to their premieres, critics were by then wiser and knew better than to predict an “epoch-making” outcome before these operas had even been mounted. The narrative of how audience members reacted to these events will resume in the final chapter, but we shall first turn to the libretti, plots, and subject matter of these six operas, and then progress to the musical content, all with the goal of understanding this emergent style of American opera.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in E. Harvey Jewell, “Performances of Contemporary and American Music in Seattle, 1853–1912” (D.M.A. diss., University of Washington, 1977), 254.

¹⁵⁸ Herbert biographer Edward Waters offers this explanation of the impact of press coverage on *Natoma*: “It was absolutely impossible for any work of art to be as great, as wonderful, as significant as the four-year-long build-up would have it; but the advance enthusiasts threw caution to the winds as they prepared the country for the phenomenal day. Neither Herbert nor Redding was responsible for these conditions; they were simply victims of well-meaning admirers and a national psychosis” (Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 379).

Figure 2.1. *New York Times*, 26 February 1911



This is one of two full-page preview articles from the *New York Times* printed on 25 February 1911, three days prior to *Natoma*'s first performance in New York City. The illustrations show Frank Preisch costumed as José Castro (top left), Gustave Huberdeau as Don Francisco (top right), Mary Garden as Natoma (center right), and Lillian Grenville and John McCormack as Barbara and Paul (center left). The top center image shows the Act II "Dagger Dance" and the lower image the setting of Act I. The text includes a lengthy plot synopsis and interview material with both Herbert and Redding.

Figure 2.2. *New York Times*, 26 February 1911

[illegible]

CHAPTER 3 — Writing in “Operese”: Plots and Librettos

Thy breath is in the breeze
That cometh from the south
Tempting the trembling trees
With yearning for thy mouth
—Poia, *Poia*, Act I¹

Hear me kindly, you must hear me.
I would be your one protector,
I would be your soul’s one shelter,
You to me are all I live for
—Burton, *The Sacrifice*, Act I, Scene VII²

Tho’ the waves ran mountain-high,
I would their strength defy,
And breast the storm that bears me close to thee,
Ah, my beloved, close to thee!
—Paul, *Natoma*, Act I, Scene VII³

Narcissa, flower of my love, would God had laid my path
mid peaceful scenes that I might bid you to my heart and
home. ... My sweetest lily-maiden, fair, thou knowest not
the ills thou woost.
—Marcus, *Narcissa*, Act I⁴

Oh, Bird of the Wilderness,
Your wild note thrills the heart of me;
Oh, nest upon my tree of love
And fill my life with melody
—Lionel, *Shanewis*, Part Two⁵

¹ Randolph Hartley, libretto for Arthur Nevin, *Poia: Opera in Three Acts* [vocal score] (Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, 1909), 29–30. Eugenie von Huhn’s German translation, sung at the opera’s premiere, reads: “Ich liebe dich! Geliebte Natoya! Der Hauch von deinem Mund ist wie des Südländs Weh’n nach deinem Kuß die Blumen vor Sehnsucht schier vergehn. Kein Glück gibt’s hienieden, das deiner Liebe gleicht, du bist das Licht meiner Seele, mein Traum, mein All!”

² Frederick S. Converse and John Macy, *The Sacrifice: An Opera in Three Acts* [libretto] (New York: H.W. Gray Company, 1911), 29–30.

³ Joseph D. Redding, *Natoma: An Opera in Three Acts* [libretto] (New York: Schirmer, 1911), 15.

⁴ Sarah Pratt Carr, *The Cost of Empire: Libretto for the Opera Narcissa* (Seattle, Wash.: The Stuff Printing Concern, 1912), 8–9.

⁵ Nelle Richmond Eberhart, *Shanewis (The Robin Woman): An Opera* [libretto] (New York: F. Rullman, 1918), 10–11.

And thus does the male protagonist in an American opera, at the height of an amorous passion, pour out his heart to his longed-for beloved in a fit of archaic language and overblown rhetoric. To the ears of the original audience, and even more so today, this hyper-stylized version of English makes for an unnatural fit when coming from the mouths of American characters on stage. The audience members themselves did not converse this way, nor did characters in contemporary novels or plays. And yet in each new native opera, the characters are consistently made to communicate in this manner. Indeed, of all the potential complications confronting any new American opera project, the problem of finding a convincing style of sung English remained the one with the least satisfactory solution.

This was a problem particular to American opera and opera in English. Audiences were accustomed to encountering opera sung in Italian, German, and French—languages which only a portion of the audience would have been able to understand. Generally, a read-through of the libretto in translation at home before going to the theater would suffice. Precise comprehension of the sung lyrics was unimportant. Instead, much of the audience would listen for their favorite voices, vaguely follow the action as the plot unfolded, and simply enjoy the music and stage spectacle. With a newly composed American opera sung in the vernacular, the text-music dynamic was thoroughly reshaped, thus confronting audiences with an unsettling combination. Potentially they could now more easily comprehend the text as it was being sung, but the inauthentic and awkward manner of speech jarred with their expectations for beautiful singing.

In many ways, this state of affairs left the American librettist at a great disadvantage. With a comprehensible text, the audience was forced to recognize, for perhaps the first time, the fact that many (or most?) opera plots are frequently improbable and occasionally ridiculous. If a character might sing an absurd lyric or the plot might be built upon a blatant breach of logic—

now that an American audience could follow such things—then the librettist would be the first to bear the blame. This anti-librettist bias has persisted in the historiography of early American opera to this day. As my exploration will ultimately suggest, this language style—not a vernacular English but rather what one critic termed “operese”—is possibly modeled upon a previously unrecognized yet widely familiar source of opera texts, the translated libretto. While I do not necessarily seek to rehabilitate the reputations of the librettists and librettos discussed here, I do however hope that a text-focused exploration will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the relative merits of these operas. The key issues here include the use of the English language, the decision to employ American subjects, the connections to libretti from the European canon, and the grammatical style of the sung texts—topics which were at the heart of the matter for libretto authors and the critical establishment alike.

Critical Debate: Opera in English

Although it should go without saying that an American national opera must be written to a libretto in the vernacular, the advisability of singing any opera in English, either in translation or to newly written texts, was nevertheless the matter of much debate. The wide range of divergent viewpoints on this topic, taken in total, presented one more impediment hindering the acceptance of a new work. For a librettist, the path towards achieving an American libretto style was a perilous one, plagued by competing expectations.⁶ How was a librettist supposed to proceed when some critics asked whether opera could even be successfully performed in

⁶ Arthur Farwell offers this metaphorical description of the situation: “At present the American musical world is shaken by the appearance of a strange monster with two heads, ‘opera in English’ and ‘English opera,’ certain authorities holding that at best it is a visionary beast such as might have been beheld by St. John upon Patmos, and others stoutly maintaining that a little cultivation would make it a valuable domestic animal.” Arthur Farwell, “American Opera on American Themes: Artistic Significance of Herbert’s *Natoma* and Converse’s *Sacrifice*,” *The American Review of Reviews* 43 (1911): 441–2.

English, while others demanded that all opera in the United States should be sung exclusively in the vernacular?

Much of the problem originated in an inherited notion of artistic status based upon sung language. By the end of the nineteenth century, the foreign-language texts of opera performance connoted high artistic status, while the English language was associated instead with lighter genres like comic opera or operetta. As Henry Lahee explained in 1902, “English opera gradually became identified with comic opera, or works of a light class quite distinct from grand opera.” Thus many of “the great singers, as a rule, decline to sing in English, not because there is any objection to the language, but because they fear they will lose their prestige.”⁷ The concept of operatic prestige, allied with a sense of elitism, was manifest nowhere more so than at New York’s Metropolitan Opera, the house that more than any other established the practice of giving operas in the original language. Andreas Dippel, manager of the Met in 1910, explained the situation:

There is [in New York] a large enough colony of Italians to patronize the Italian operas and the French people come to the French opera, and so you have it. The American who is an opera lover is a person of such cultivation that he understands both French and German, perhaps Italian, too, and the English. Translation is not at all necessary to his enjoyment.⁸

Yet surely the opera-loving American to whom Dippel refers is a rare individual indeed, particularly outside of cosmopolitan New York City.

Aside from the elitist appeal of foreign-language performances, many commentators found the practice to be wholly justifiable on artistic grounds. The soprano Mary Garden, for one, went so far as to suggest, “The *only* way to give opera is to give it in the original language”

⁷ Henry C. Lahee, *Grand Opera in America* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1902), 310–11 and 312.

⁸ Dippel quoted in an interview, “Should Grand Opera Be Sung in English? How the Question is Viewed Professionally,” *New York Times*, 6 February 1910.

(emphasis added).⁹ Similarly, Richard Aldrich endorsed the Met's decision in no uncertain terms: "Its policy of giving operas in the languages in which they were written has commended itself to its patrons, and to continue it is unquestionably its wisest course."¹⁰ Yet for Gustav Kobbé, the entire practice was bewildering because of its avoidance of the one language that the general public could readily comprehend. Kobbé wondered, "there must be an opera microbe as yet insufficiently understood, under whose insidious influence people otherwise perfectly sane cheerfully pay five dollars for the privilege of sitting in an orchestra stall and listening to something in a language they cannot understand."¹¹ Kobbé's puzzlement notwithstanding, it is important to note that the "original language only" point of view can indeed encompass the singing of American operas in English as well.

Antonin Dvořák, as with so many other facets of the American music debate, provided a key impetus behind the calls for the performance of operas in the vernacular. Writing in 1895, he observed that "opera audiences ... are in no sense representative of the people at large. I have no doubt, however, that if the Americans had a chance to hear grand opera sung in their own language they would enjoy it as well and appreciate it as highly as the opera-goers of Vienna, Paris, or Munich enjoy theirs."¹² The hints of populism and nationalism underlying Dvořák's premise would become the explicit focus of this argument as it developed into the early twentieth century. Arthur Farwell hoped that as audiences grew more accustomed to hearing new American operas in English, they would then "be likely to want to hear many of the old operas in

⁹ Garden quoted in an interview, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Richard Aldrich, "What the Season Promises at the Metropolitan," *New York Times*, 12 November 1911.

¹¹ Gustav Kobbé, "Learning to Listen to Music," in *University Musical Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, A History of Music: Music in America, ed. Louis C. Elson (New York: The University Society, 1910), 291.

¹² Antonin Dvořák, "Music in America," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 90, no. 537 (February 1895): 432.

English, and will probably demand such a hearing.”¹³ Even the German soprano Johanna Gadski, a regular on the Met’s roster, realized that opera “must be in English if the majority of people are ever to understand and enjoy it. Opera given in a language which is not understood can never become popular.”¹⁴

Reginald DeKoven too recognized the role of the public in effecting a change. He sensed a “rapidly growing popular sentiment” in which American operagoers wondered “why opera in English should not be admitted to our great opera-houses.” He continued:

The foreign influences which have controlled, and still control, these enterprises, were at first definitely inimical to including opera in English in their scheme of opera-giving; but popular opinion is mighty and will prevail, so that now opera in the vernacular, both original and in translations of standard works, has gained a permanent place in the regular repertoires and plans of our three leading operatic institutions.¹⁵

Here, nationalism merges with populism as the motivating force, as DeKoven hopes for English-language opera to “prevail” over the control of “foreign influences.” Indeed, he finds it a “positive necessity” for “English opera ... to stimulate and develop American musical art and the American composer, but also to encourage and increase that much needed national confidence in native musical possibilities which begets a national art and the love and respect of a nation for it.”¹⁶ Edward Hipsher, likewise, brought the ideals of democracy into the debate, considering it not simply a preference but indeed a *right* of American audiences to hear opera in their own language:

Opera in America may be democratized by singing it in English and making it intelligible to the masses; and this course is the only sure way to give grand opera a standing that will

¹³ Arthur Farwell, “American Opera on American Themes,” 446.

¹⁴ Gadski quoted in an interview, “Should Grand Opera Be Sung in English?” *New York Times*, 6 February 1910.

¹⁵ Reginald DeKoven, “Opera in English: Its Relation to the American Composer and Singer,” *The Century Magazine* 87 (March 1914): 676.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 678.

endure. What we want and need is to understand our opera. As well as tunes, we want words and actions to be made plain to us. Americans have the right—already enjoyed by European nations—of understanding what is sung to them.¹⁷

Such a shift, it was hoped, would significantly alter how an audience could relate to opera in performance. As Oscar Sonneck explained, when an opera is performed in the vernacular, it “stops being a pantomime with vocalizes and becomes what it was intended for by its creators, a musical drama.”¹⁸ Their hopes and dreams are clear—opera in English would be intelligible to the audience and thus all Americans, not just the cultured few, might embrace opera as a product of their own nation and people, instead of as an exotic, elitist import.

This new expectation—that opera singers must be willing and able to perform in English—presented a significant technical and logistical hurdle. The majority of stars on the American stage were European born and trained. They predominantly sang, conducted rehearsals, and even gave press interviews in languages other than English. Even American singers had very limited experience performing in their own native language. Many observers were quick to point out this fault. Lawrence Gilman, for one, worried that operas could not yet “be entrusted to singers who will enunciate the English text with ... lucidity and intelligence”

¹⁷ Edward Ellsworth Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers: A Complete History of Serious American Opera* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1927), 63–4.

B. M. Steigman again provides the sarcastic, unsympathetic rebuttal to Hipsher’s argument: “So the champions of opera in English put megaphones to their mouths and proclaimed to our unsuspecting country that our national honor was being outraged by our opera producers, who were openly contemptuous of the language of our forefathers. Germany, France and Italy performed all opera, no matter what the original, in their native tongue. Of us, only, must it be said that we found our vernacular unendurable.” See B. M. Steigman, “The Great American Opera,” *Music and Letters* 6 (1925): 365.

Composer John Powell’s conspiracy theory that foreigners had somehow blocked the growth of opera in English through “a well-organized propaganda” is no more than the suspicion of a misdirected extremist: “The habit of humble acceptance of these alien oracles was early formed. They did not even let us have opera in our own language. The English language was crude, harsh, unsingable. So it was to their untrained and clumsy tongues. And as there was no native competition, there was no influence to compel them to learn to use and respect the language of the people on whose bounty they were waxing fat.” See John Powell, “How America Can Develop a National Music,” *The Etude* 45 (1927): 350.

¹⁸ Oscar G. Sonneck, “A Survey of Music in America,” in *Suum Cuique: Essays in Music* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1916), 151.

and that “until singers of the first rank shall have learned the secret of lucid English diction, it would be a waste of time for them to attempt opera-singing in the vernacular.” For Gilman, poor diction in English-language opera was just as problematic as opera sung in an unintelligible foreign language: “For what is the use of opera in English if the hearer does not know, except by information and belief, that it *is* in English?” (emphasis original).¹⁹ This was a certainly a legitimate concern. To give just one example, Mary Garden, a native English speaker from Scotland, witnessed an absurd scene as her fellow cast members’ struggled with their lyrics in *Natoma*: “most of the others in the cast were French, and they had to sing in English, and believe me, that was a scream. ... As I came in [to rehearsal] I heard those Frenchmen trying to pronounce some of the English lines. I just lay on the piano in hysterics.”²⁰ Even some native English speakers were unprepared to produce the vernacular in their operatic voice, a flaw that Reginald DeKoven blamed on “the necessity of singing almost exclusively in foreign languages consequent upon their having been trained abroad.”²¹

However, others found these fears and concerns to be unfounded. Andreas Dippel, although accustomed to working with foreign singers at the Met, felt confident that “the majority of the foreign singers [would be] willing to do their best with the language. They would learn English quickly enough if it were required of them. It is not a question of their willingness, or

¹⁹ Lawrence Gilman, “The Question of Opera in English,” in *Nature in Music; and Other Studies in the Tone-Poetry of Today* (New York: John Lane Company, 1914), 152; and “Opera in English,” *The North American Review* 193 (1911): 749.

Henry Krehbiel later echoed Gilman’s exact concern: “Of what good is the use of the vernacular in an opera if the words which are sung cannot be understood? What is the use of an English text if it is even less intelligible to the hearer than German, French, or Italian?” Henry Edward Krehbiel, *More Chapters of Opera; being Historical and Critical Observations and Records Concerning the Lyric Drama in New York from 1908 to 1918* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), 165.

²⁰ Mary Garden and Louis Biancolli, *Mary Garden’s Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 235.

²¹ DeKoven, “Opera in English,” 679.

their ability to master the language—that is easy enough.”²² While some critics seemed entirely pessimistic in regards to singers’ abilities, Dippel instead places his confidence in their professionalism—a safe bet especially in the United States, where performances of operas in the original languages was becoming the norm. Singers were more and more being expected to perform in multiple languages, and so surely English could be one more addition to the list. In Oscar Sonneck’s opinion, the American audience too faced a learning curve in their approach to hearing opera in their own language:

[A] language sung and a language spoken sound very different. Language sung is a jargon, the understanding of which depends on an acquired taste and on practice. ... In other words, the success of opera in the vernacular depends as much on the practice of the audience to listen to its own language in the disguise of musical speech, as on the practice of the singers to sing therein and the practice of the composer to compose therein.²³

Only with effort from both singers and audience members, apparently, could English truly be a viable language option for opera performances.

It is against this backdrop that composers and librettists strove to craft a uniquely American style of sung text for their new operas. While the climate was indeed fertile for such an undertaking, the opinions of the opposition remained a consistent hindrance to the progress of national opera in the United States. Creating opera in a language that was not universally recognized as acceptable for such a serious, high-brow genre was one of the many obstacles needing to be overcome by this vanguard creative group—obstacles that are almost too numerous to count. As we shall see, even basic issues like choosing suitably operatic indigenous subject matter and designing the style of English used in the sung texts proved to be contentious points for continuing debate.

²² Dippel quoted in an interview, “Should Grand Opera Be Sung in English?” *New York Times*, 6 February 1910.

²³ Sonneck, “A Survey of Music in America,” 151–2.

The Use of American Subjects — Why Indians?

Perhaps the first and most fundamental task for any opera creator is to select suitable subject matter. One might assume that a potential American national opera would require an American—or at least New World—setting, but even this issue required vocal advocacy. Arthur Elson, writing in 1925, makes a compelling argument in support of employing American subjects in opera plots and librettos. His commentary, with its broad range of possible topics, acts as both a summary of earlier works (including those considered here) and as encouragement for future composers:

As regards subjects for librettos, we have a great variety of the best. They include Indian legends, colonial adventures, pioneer events, and historical scenes of great power; and they vary in local color from the Latin-American glamour of the tropics to the icy grandeur of the frozen north. With these advantages, librettists do not need to rush to foreign stories, or resuscitate antiquities. ... With the dramatic episodes that abound in the legends, and even the history, of the aborigines, it should not be hard for anyone with literary and dramatic taste to concoct a libretto that should be little inferior to the Wagnerian stories in stage effect.²⁴

Eleanor Freer, herself an opera composer, wrote even more insistently in support of using indigenous subjects:

[I]f our opera is to serve—as all art should—as history, then the more intimate idea given of our race and customs the more valuable the opera will be as a document. And, after all, why should not our librettists use the material which lies ready to their hand? The themes of the European librettists are worn threadbare. In our folk-lore, in the legends and stories of the countryside, in our history of pioneering and exploration—yes, in the life of today—lies treasure for those who will delve.²⁵

Both writers have no doubts that their own country could provide opera writers with an ample supply of subjects and present American topics as a healthy alternative to an inherited European repertoire.

²⁴ The quote comes from Arthur's supplementary chapters and not Louis's main text. Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music*, revised to 1925 by Arthur Elson (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 379–80.

²⁵ Eleanor Everest Freer, "Music and Musicians," *Overland Monthly* 83 (March 1925): 137.

In order to establish opera as an expression of national character, librettists needed subjects that were historical, serious, and distinctly American. When one considers the breadth of topics that make up the American experience, the regular inclusion of Indians on the operatic stage can at first seem puzzling, especially during the early twentieth century when Indians remained isolated on reservations and were generally assumed to be a “vanishing race.” As Donald Kaufmann explains, the nation’s intellectual center was “smitten with the prevailing opinion that the workings of God or Nature had decreed the end of the Indian in American life. A vanishing race had no business in beaux-arts.”²⁶ Yet alongside this destructive current of thought, there was movement in the opposite direction too.

The production of these operas immediately follows the first wave of scholarly ethnographic attention that sought to “rescue” the various tribes’ customs, music, legends and religious beliefs from what they perceived to be the imminent extinction of the Indian peoples as a culturally distinct group. As Michael Pisani describes, the results of this scholarly effort trickled down to the broader population:

At first, studies of the American Indian originated in anthropological and sociological writings and were directed toward a highly specialized readership of scholarly journals. Gradually, this information filtered into other, more general discussions of Indian life and culture in such ‘literary’ magazines as *Scribner’s* and (later) *Century Illustrated*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Harper’s Weekly*. In splendidly detailed articles, these magazines treated Indian subjects with the same curiosity and allure as they did, for example, Egyptian archaeology, early navigation of the Samoan Isles, or Congo dancers in New Orleans. It became increasingly difficult for the well-read Bostonian or New Yorker to avoid encountering the expanding knowledge about the American Indian.²⁷

²⁶ Donald L. Kaufmann, “The Indian as Media Hand-Me-Down,” in *The Pretend Indians: Images of Native Americans in the Movies*, ed. Gretchen M. Bataille and Charles L. P. Silet (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980), 26.

²⁷ Michael Vincent Pisani, “Exotic Sounds in the Native Land: Portrayals of North American Indians in Western Music” (Ph.D. diss., Eastman School of Music, 1996), 43.

From this, we can draw two significant conclusions. The opera audience of the time, which overlapped with the informed readership of this type of magazine, would have been well-aware of the ongoing research on the Indian peoples. Second, the exoticized context in which these magazines presented their Indian coverage laid the groundwork for the type of operatic exoticism that would appear on stage.

Symbolically, Native Americans can indeed fulfill the nationalist imperative. As the earliest residents in the New World, they provided an unquestionably non-European pool of characters and plot topics. Their roots in the past conferred the sort of historicity that was generally expected of national opera—recall that only *Shanewis* is set in the present day. Indian mythology in particular seemed to offer the same sort of dramatic potential that Wagner found in Norse legends. Music critic Richard Aldrich, for one, recognized that “the vast Indian mythology ... is of the greatest beauty and poetic suggestiveness.”²⁸ Indian myths qualify as distinctively American since they are truly indigenous (unlike the stories imported by immigrants) and can thus potentially sustain a nationalist foundation. *Poia* attempts to capitalize on this potential with a plot based upon an authentic Blackfeet Indian legend and a cast of exclusively Indian characters. Yet from the perspective of Anglo-America, the Indian myths and legends were exotic stories that one might read in a book rather than an integral part of their shared cultural heritage.

The Indian presence in the Eastern United States had long since ceased to be a factor in the cultural imagination, hence Indianist operatic settings, by default, landed in the West. The trend of setting operas in the Western part of the United States was so ubiquitous that George Upton, in his 1914 book of standard opera plot synopses, could remark of *The Sacrifice* that

²⁸ Richard Aldrich, “Indian and Negro Music: The President’s Suggestion as to Their Value for American Composers,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1906.

“*Like all other recent American operas, its scene is laid in the wild West*” (emphasis added).²⁹

The West—and in the case of *Azora*, the pre-Cortez Aztec empire—acts as a symbol of American expansion and dominance. In four of these operas—*Natoma*, *The Sacrifice*, *Narcissa*, and *Azora*—Anglo-American characters or their representative stand-ins (Cortez and his soldiers) wind up being the dominant group. It is made perfectly clear that the whites are destined to control this territory and that the Indians are in decline.

The use of Indians as dramatic subject matter in fact has a long pedigree in American culture. John Bray’s *The Indian Princess*, the earliest published complete vocal score to an American play with songs and incidental music, is a telling of the Pocahontas history.³⁰ Thus singing Indians go back to the very beginnings of theater in this country. Likewise, Indianist literature follows a lengthy lineage from the novels of James Fennimore Cooper and Longfellow’s narrative poem *The Song of Hiawatha* in the early nineteenth century to innumerable tawdry dime novels with Indian characters at the end of the century. Melodramatic heroines were frequently tormented by Indian villains, while Helen Hunt Jackson’s hugely popular 1884 novel *Ramona* offered a sympathetically portrayed Indian heroine. This novel shares a California setting and a mid nineteenth-century timeframe with both *Natoma* and *The Sacrifice*. Wild West shows brought the frontier to Eastern and European cities, while the photographs of Edward S. Curtis delivered images of Indians safely to the drawing room. Zane Grey’s novels of adventure in the Wild West first appeared during the same years as these

²⁹ George P. Upton, *The Standard Operas: Their Plots and Their Music*, rev. ed. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1914), 62.

³⁰ John Bray, *The Indian Princess, or La Belle Sauvage*, reprint of the original 1808 edition, *Earlier American Music* 11 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972).

Indianist/Western operas.³¹ Thus, a librettist had a wealth of Indian materials at his or her creative disposal. They were simply extending a well-trod creative path into operatic terrain.

Opera, more than other theatrical genres, was best suited to capture the exoticism and spectacle of Indian life. As Eugene Jones explains, whereas “the popular melodrama circuit persisted in showing Indians as the blackest villains” and “in vaudeville, the Indian was good for a laugh; in pageants and on the opera stage, his way of life could be elaborated on for spectacular effect.”³² Nationalist opera is the perfect outlet for the kind of localized exoticism and spectacle that Indian topics readily supply. Large-scale ceremonial scenes appear in *Poia*, *Azora*, and *Shanewis*, while the West Coast settings of *Natoma*, *The Sacrifice*, and *Narcissa* permit an ample display of local color.³³

Beyond mere spectacle and exoticism, the use of Indian characters and settings also offered librettists the chance to explore an alternative to and an escape from the anxieties of modern urban society. Historian Sherry Smith explains, “What they believed they saw in Indians’ lives—mystery, beauty, spirituality, artistry, and community—appealed to them precisely because of its apparent divergence from Anglo-American emphases on possessive individualism, conformity, rationality, scientific determinism, materialism, and corruption.”³⁴ *Poia*, with its pristine pre-Columbian setting and the title character’s pilgrimage to the Indian

³¹ For a thorough overview of these materials, see Edward Buscombe, “*Injuns!*” *Native Americans in the Movies* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 30–78.

³² Eugene H. Jones, *Native Americans as Shown on the Stage, 1753–1916* (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 149.

³³ Composer Ned Rorem’s disparaging description of these and other related operas as “patriotic ‘Pocahontas’ affairs with tom-toms, rife during World War I” seems unfairly harsh if not misguided, given their position within the broader cultural mainstream. See Ned Rorem, “In Search of American Opera,” *Opera News* 56, no. 1 (July 1991): 10.

³⁴ Sherry L. Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9. European opera composers and librettists were of course attracted in similar ways and for similar reasons to “exotics” from Africa, the Far East, and Gypsy communities.

gods in heaven, dramatizes an escapist alternative to the industrial world. Lionel also catches a glimpse of this alternative when he visits the reservation with Shanewis and witnesses the final dance of the powwow—the “authentic” one the Indians perform for each other after the crowd of white spectators has departed. Natoma, by accepting Christianity and entering the convent, ultimately gives in to “conformity” and “rationality.” Likewise, in *The Sacrifice*, the old Indian servant Tomasa is the only character who foresees the harm that modern white society will cause. Michael Pisani suggests that such plots, through this “retrenchment from modernity,” are “both peculiarly conservative and subversive at the same time.”³⁵ Indeed, these plot elements are conservative in that they resist the progressive changes of modernization, subversive because the suggested alternative comes from one of the least respected ethnic groups in the country.

Cinematic Parallels and Stock Character Types

During the same years that these opera projects are taking shape, the emerging Hollywood film industry was also busily exploring the Indian as subject matter.³⁶ Both cinema—that most national of American entertainments—and grand opera were relatively new artistic pursuits for American artists, and both achieved their first period of maturity during the 1910s. That these industries would incorporate Indian characters in a major portion of their early projects is quite remarkable. Each of these genres builds upon the tradition of dramatic Indians inherited from 19th-century plays, melodrama, literature, dime novels, and Wild West shows.³⁷ Both movie directors and opera librettists alike savored the dramatic potential of Indian

³⁵ Michael Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 213.

³⁶ Edison had already filmed Indians in some of his earliest Kinetoscope projects from the 1890s. See Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 16–8.

³⁷ Focusing on their connections to cinema, these earlier models are summarized in Kilpatrick’s first chapter, “Genesis of the Stereotypes,” although nowhere does she point out any connections with opera (*ibid.*, 1–15).

exoticism and explored themes of racial conflict. Even the rate of Indian appearances in opera and cinema are strikingly similar.³⁸ From 1910 to 1912, the height of the subject's popularity, movie studios released about a dozen one- or two-reel Indian-themed shorts per month. *Poia*, *Natoma*, *The Sacrifice*, and *Narcissa* each premiered during this time frame. With the shift toward feature-length films around 1912, Indian subjects become less prevalent but still appeared in some of the period's most prominent cinematic projects.³⁹ These are the years before the establishment of the cowboy-and-Indian-type Western, in which Indians play a far less nuanced role. Just as the operatic Indian had essentially run its course by the end of the decade, so too had the Indian as a central character in movies. Instead, as Edward Buscombe explains, "In the 'epic' Westerns of the mid-1920s ... Indians feature merely as one of the hazards of westward expansion overcome by the whites."⁴⁰

Both film directors and opera librettists employ strikingly parallel plot devices and narrative solutions when dealing with Indian subject matter. D. W. Griffith's *A Pueblo Legend* (1912) mirrors Nevin's *Poia* in that it too presents a legendary plot focused on Indian religious beliefs. Both works explore the image of the Indian in a natural, paradise-like setting, before the disruption of the white modern world.⁴¹ Cecil B. DeMille's *The Woman God Forgot* (1917), like Hadley's *Azora*, allows the daughter of Montezuma to fall in love with someone from outside the Aztec people. In the film, Metropolitan opera star Geraldine Farrar portrayed Montezuma's

³⁸ The following figures are summarized from Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005), 2 and 17.

³⁹ Jacquelyn Kilpatrick offers somewhat contradictory figures. She suggests that "over one hundred movies about Indians were made each year between 1910 and 1913, and almost that many in each of the remaining years of the silent screen," although she does not account for the shift from short subjects to feature-length films (*Celluloid Indians*, 22).

⁴⁰ Buscombe, *Injuns*, 92.

⁴¹ For a plot summary and brief analysis of the film, see Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians*, 22–4. For more on Griffith's other Indianist films, see Buscombe, *Injuns*, 82–5.

daughter, here named Tecza, who falls for the captain of Cortez's army. Similar to the ending of *Natoma*, another DeMille film, *The Vanishing American* (1925) based on a Zane Grey novel, explores how "assimilation, disguised as Christianity, becomes the solution to [Indian] survival."⁴²

Love triangles—often interracial—motivate the plots of Indian films just as much as they do in opera. *The Yaqui Girl* (James Young Deer, 1910) develops a triangle with an Indian couple and a Mexican rival, similar to the Mexican rivals in both *Natoma* and *The Sacrifice* but without the added racial element of a white male competitor. Another Young Deer picture, *For the Squaw* (1911), deals with a relationship between an Indian woman and white man who also has a white fiancée back home in an Eastern city. Likewise, in D. W. Griffith's *The Chief's Daughter* (1911), "a white man's seduction of an Indian woman causes his angry fiancée to break off the engagement, [while] the rejected Indian maiden returns to her people."⁴³ This theme returns again in one of the most financially successful and artistically viable of the early feature-length films, Cecil B. DeMille's *The Squaw Man* (1914). In this film's complicated plot, an English aristocrat lives with an Indian woman in Wyoming and fathers a child with her, all while trying to escape some sort of society scandal back home and leaving his English fiancée behind.⁴⁴ One cannot help but assume that Tsianina, Cadman, and Eberhart were aware of these films when they were planning the plot of *Shanewis*. These interracial triangles all deal with the stereotype of the "squaw man"—"a white man who cohabits with an Indian woman for a protracted length

⁴² See Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian*, 23–4 and 37 for the quote.

⁴³ James Young Deer was one of the first American-Indian writer-director-actors, active in Hollywood during the early silent era. These Young Deer films are briefly mentioned in *ibid.*, 2; quote on 7.

⁴⁴ For a more thorough plot summary, see Buscombe, *Injuns*, 93.

of time, usually in an exclusively Indian milieu.”⁴⁵ Lionel and Paul, in *Shanewis* and *Natoma* respectively, are both in danger of becoming one should they, in the end, settle with their Indian romances. Given the overwhelmingly negative audience attitudes toward this type of mixed relationship, it is no wonder that the trend for both films and operas on this theme soon faded from the scene.

There is no direct evidence from the period to suggest that cinema is directly influencing opera, or vice-versa.⁴⁶ Perhaps the genre of cinema itself was still considered a lowbrow novelty and not deserving of mention alongside opera. Westerns, specifically, were accorded a particularly low artistic status and “rarely shown in the elegant theaters.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the numerous opera-cinema parallels, when taken in total, are quite remarkable. It is undeniable that both pursuits—opera-writing and filmmaking—are developing the same creative trends simultaneously. This fact alone is enough to demonstrate the pervasiveness of Indian elements in the cultural imagination of the time, as the use of Indian characters and plots in opera interacts with a much broader cultural mainstream.

However, as Judith Gray observes, it is important not to ignore the fact that “the image (rather than the reality) of ‘the Indian’ was seized upon as the very epitome of the New World.”⁴⁸ These operas indeed engage primarily with White perceptions of Indians. Donald Kaufmann explains, “The Indian stereotype had been put in a time freeze. ... [T]he Indian found himself typecast as a historical relic, as the American who had vanished with the prairie, whose

⁴⁵ Definition from Jones, *Native Americans as Shown on the Stage*, 153.

⁴⁶ This connection is also overlooked in all of the recent writing on cinematic Indians cited here, with the exception of Eugene Jones. He supplies only a single paragraph on Indianist opera, yet even this is compromised by significant factual errors. See Jones, *Native Americans as Shown on the Stage*, 156.

⁴⁷ Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians*, 33.

⁴⁸ Judith Gray, “When Cultures Meet,” *Folklife Center News* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1992), online at <<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/news/Fall92.txt>>.

viable role in American life faded somewhere between the dime novel and the Hollywood Western.”⁴⁹ To search for ethnographic accuracy in these operas is a futile exercise that misses the point entirely.

From cinema and the nation’s diverse array of white appropriations of Indians in other dramatic or narrative forms, opera librettists could draw upon a well-established set of stock Indian character types. Theater historian Eugene Jones and musicologist Michael Pisani provide similar lists of these stereotyped characters. Table 3.1 below lists their related terminology, with analogous categories aligned. Characters tied to each of these stock types make their duly expected appearances in the pages of the six operas examined here. Operatic manifestations are listed in the right-hand column of the table. Note that Natoma can double as both a “beautiful Indian maiden,” in her role as a possible love interest to Paul, and “a faithful friend and servant,” since her most powerful bond of loyalty is to Barbara. Lead male protagonists like Poia and Xalca fit the “Noble Savage” stereotype just as comfortably as they do the heldentenor archetype of which opera audiences are more accustomed to seeing.

⁴⁹ Kaufmann, “The Indian as Media Hand-Me-Down,” 22.

Table 3.1. Indian Character Types

Eugene Jones (1988) ⁵⁰		Michael Pisani (1996) ⁵¹	Opera Characters
“the Noble Savage”	↔	“a noble Red Man”	^a Poia, ^d Yellow Serpent, ^e Xalca
“the Pathetic Dusky Maiden” ⁵²	↔	“the beautiful Indian maiden”	^a Natoya, ^b Natoma, ^e Azora, ^f Shanewis
		“a faithful friend and servant”	^b Natoma, ^d Elijah
“the fearsome Indian villain”	↔	“a savage nemesis”	^a Sumatsi, ^e Montezuma, ^e Ramatzin
“the parasitical drunken Indian”	↔	“the Indian Idler and drunkard”	(n/a)
		“the murderous thief”	(n/a)
		“the bitter half-breed”	^b José Castro, ^d Delaware Tom, ^f Philip Harjo
Additional type not included in either list: “the wise, old sage”			^a Nenahu, ^c Tomasa, ^d Waskema, ^e Papantzin

Key to Operas:

- (a) Nevin: *Poia*
- (b) Herbert: *Natoma*
- (c) Converse: *The Sacrifice*
- (d) Moore: *Narcissa*
- (e) Hadley: *Azora*
- (f) Cadman: *Shanewis*

⁵⁰ Jones, *Native Americans as Shown on the Stage*, 164.

⁵¹ Pisani, “Exotic Sounds in the Native Land,” 46.

⁵² Jones’s term also suggests connections to contemporary American popular songs, in which “dusky” is a common euphemism for persons of dark skin and “dusky maiden” could signify the stereotyped construct of a beautiful dark-skinned woman of any race. See for instance James W. Johnson’s lyrics for “Tell Me, Dusky Maiden” (1901), “Under the Bamboo Tree” (1902), and “My Maori Maid” (1905) or Arthur Gillespie’s text for “When You Go A Hunting Dusky Maid” (1906). For a discussion of popular songs on Indian topics, see *ibid.*, 385–93 and 560–2.

Angela Aleiss's summary of the Indian character types found in early cinema suggests that, if anything, Hollywood offered an even more diverse collection of Indians and plot types than opera: "Tales of ruthless whites would parallel those of hostile warriors, lasting interracial marriages would complement the Indian/white relationships that failed, sympathetic half-breeds would occasionally offset the treacherous ones, and an Indian's heroic sacrifice might be matched by a white man's generosity."⁵³ It should come as no surprise that "ruthless whites" and "lasting interracial marriages" fail to make an appearance in plots devised for the more conservative world of opera.

The use of operatic Indian heroes reaches deeper than the basic "Noble Savage" stereotype by tapping into a more potent cultural current. Kara Gardner explains that the "Native American man became a symbol of strength and virility for many white American artists and public figures at the turn of the century."⁵⁴ This is particularly reflected in the artwork of Frederick Remington and the progressive Indian policies of the Theodore Roosevelt administration. Thus in opera we encounter the masculine "strength and virility" of both Poia and Xalca, whose bravery and courage is offered as a moral exemplar. From the standpoint of nationalist opera, these characters symbolically represent a uniquely and authentically American type of hero.

On a more basic level than this type of symbolic connotation, the simple inclusion of familiar stock character types helped to enhance the audience accessibility of these works. If singing Indians and American opera in general were unfamiliar experiences for an audience, at least the character and plot types would help usher them into more familiar dramatic terrain. Gail

⁵³ Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian*, 2.

⁵⁴ Kara Anne Gardner, "*Living by the Ladies' Smiles: The Feminization of American Music and the Modernist Reaction*" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1999), 79.

Miller, in her Master's thesis on *Natoma*, suggests that "the use of popular fiction as a model for the libretto was brilliant, for it often contained fairly simple, yet highly dramatic, plots and a wide range of character types."⁵⁵ Eric Myers, on the other hand, felt that these same characteristics make the opera "virtually unstageable today" because "It was the kind of story already dreadfully familiar to nickelodeon audiences of the era."⁵⁶ Myers, however, seems to disregard the historical circumstances which led to the selection of this type of plot. The search for a suitable American opera subject simply followed the well-established precedents of other artistic pursuits. Stock character types and plot outlines related to cinema, dime novels, or Westerns supplied a toolbox filled with ample variety. In the context of film, literature, and other forms of popular entertainment, Indians begin to seem like a relatively obvious choice for the making of a potential American National Opera.

The Use of American Subjects — Why Not Something Other than Indians?

Even if Indians were an obvious choice, this certainly does not mean that they were the only choice or that everyone whole-heartedly endorsed the idea. Lawrence Gilman, for one, could barely stomach such operatic fare, writing in 1916 that for him, "The imagination reels at the thought of a male Indian—either the picturesque savage of the romantic tradition or his unlovely survival on the reservations—as a serious figure in opera."⁵⁷ His comment is directed at *Natoma* and he is apparently grateful that at least the lead Indian role is for a female singer. *Azora* and *Shanewis* with their significant male Indian roles were yet to come. In Gilman's

⁵⁵ Gail A. Miller, "Victor Herbert's *Natoma*: The Creation of an American Grand Opera" (M.A. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1994), 45. Miller devotes an entire section to a thorough exploration of this topic (31–46).

⁵⁶ Eric Myers, "Opera at Land's Edge," *Opera* 55 (2004): 397.

⁵⁷ Lawrence Gilman, "The Red Man in the Theater," *North American Review* 203 (1916): 617.

opinion, “Our American Red man ... [in opera] has been, almost without exception, either an absurdity or a bore. To the imagination a puissant and heroic being, he has defied concrete projection in plays and operas. Why it is that so romantic and stirring a figure should thus defy dramatic or lyric embodiment is not easy to say.”⁵⁸ Given that Indian characters appear in a relatively large proportion of American operas of the period, these comments may reflect more of Gilman’s personal prejudices than an actual difficulty faced by librettists and opera composers. Despite the suspension of disbelief required by opera in general, singing Indians seem to push Gilman beyond what he can handle.

Anton Seidl, the famed conductor and New-World Wagner-evangelist, was not originally convinced that Indians could provide appropriately operatic material either. In his mind, the problem was that “this country is so young that its history does not afford material for great conceptions as do the European countries, rich in legend and tradition. One might go for material back to the Indians, but it would be pretty thin; it would be lacking in those majestic elements which Wagner found in the Norse legends.”⁵⁹ Obviously McClintock and Nevin would disagree. However, as Seidl became more acquainted with Indian history and legend, he apparently changed his mind and near the end of his life did in fact revisit this source material. Having conducted *The Ring* for years, Seidl, a would-be composer, thought he might try to emulate Wagner’s example. In the history of Hiawatha’s founding of the Iroquois Confederacy of the Five Nations Seidl found a potential subject, and not just for a single opera but for a projected

⁵⁸ Ibid., 616.

⁵⁹ Seidl, “Wagner’s Influence,” 90.

trilogy. Francis Neilson authored two acts of a libretto for the first of the three planned operas. Unfortunately Seidl only lived long enough to begin sketching the opening act.⁶⁰

Given what we would today consider to be the nation's defining historical events, some commentators have wondered why these were not deemed suitable for operatic treatment. Harold Briggs suggests that "the day had not yet dawned when other American experiences—the Revolution and Civil War, slavery and the frontier—had settled in sufficiently to be considered 'native'" and hence suitably nationalist for an opera subject.⁶¹ His explanation is problematic on several fronts. The "Indian problem" and the issue of assimilation were hardly solved by the early 1900s, suggesting that the use of Indian topics would have been equally "unsettling" for the original audiences. Of the operas examined here, only *Poia* and *Azora* fit Briggs's expectation of a subject historically removed by enough years to be truly "settled," but three works are indeed set out on "the frontier"—*Natoma*, *Narcissa*, and *The Sacrifice*. At least one composer was contemporaneously looking to the Revolutionary era. In the summer of 1903, Charles Ives commenced the initial planning of an opera, in collaboration with his uncle Lyman Brewster as librettist. This potential work would have been based upon Brewster's play about the treason of Benedict Arnold, but unfortunately it never progressed past the libretto-planning stage.⁶²

Ives's contemporary Walter Spalding, writing in 1918, had another option in mind: "If dramatic subjects are needed, why does not some American composer give us a musical portrait of Lincoln? ... In Lincoln the artist would have a far grander character; and his life with its

⁶⁰ See Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 167–70. Horowitz explains that "Seidl's version of American opera combined American myth, Wagnerian technique, and the Indian tunes that stirred Dvořák. He believed in the civilizing influence of New World music dramas—as a source of national and not merely musical identity" (170).

⁶¹ Harold Briggs, "Indians!: A Whole Movement of Native Opera Romanticized the American Savage," *Opera News* 40, no. 23 (1976): 51.

⁶² For more information see Denise Von Glahn Cooney, "Reconciliations: Time, Space and the American Place in the Music of Charles Ives" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1995), 100–2.

vigorous freedom, its humor and its tragedy, music alone could worthily commemorate.”⁶³ H.

Earle Johnson, writing nearly 50 years later, offers an expanded list of suggestions:

[I]t is unexplainable that composers of the United States have avoided the larger issues of the Revolution, have failed to go forward with the expanding West, to mark the cowboy, the frontiersman, the ‘Forty-Niners,’ or take up Lincoln as a symbol of nobility, to fight musically at Gettysburg, relight the Chicago and San Francisco fires, revel in instances and objects of historical and fictional color, sail with clipper ship fact and romance, or indulge in the slave trade.⁶⁴

Yet Johnson is still thinking in terms of National Opera; that is, he laments the absence of an opera that can speak to the nation as a whole, just as Glinka’s *A Life for the Tsar* or Weber’s *Der Freischütz* spoke to Russians and Germans respectively. He is understandably frustrated with the fact that so many significant historical events have never been dramatized on the operatic stage, but he seems unaware of the fact that the cultural conditions required for the emergence of a national opera, as defined by Dahlhaus and Taruskin, had surely passed by the 1960s.

Given that the trend of operatic Indians subsided by the 1920s, was the use of Indian subject matter in opera a dead end proposition? At least one writer thought not. Walter Rundell, writing in 1962, when these operas were still closer to living memory but had already disappeared from the stage, recognized that the full potential remained yet unrealized:

That this subject has presented some peculiar problems for the lyric stage is evidenced by the fact that no Indian opera has attained any permanent success.... And in these facts lies a paradox, for it seems that no American subject would have more innate drama than the displacement of the Indian by the white man. Furthermore, the Indians offer an exotic subject, and operatic composers have a demonstrable weakness for exoticism. Hence we can only conclude that this is a field still rich for tillage.⁶⁵

⁶³ Walter R. Spalding, “The War in its Relation to American Music,” *Musical Quarterly* 4 (1918): 10–11.

⁶⁴ H. Earle Johnson, *Operas on American Subjects* (New York: Coleman-Ross Company, 1964), 12.

⁶⁵ Walter Rundell, Jr., “The West as an Operatic Setting,” in *Probing the American West: Papers from the Santa Fe Conference*, ed. K. Ross Toole et al. (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1962), 57–8.

Regardless of what subject matter an opera composer or librettist might ultimately select, the question remained whether or not an American setting alone was enough to make an opera American. B. M. Steigman, for one, seemed rather skeptical about the whole process, particularly if an Indian topic was the end result:

The theme of the Great American Opera, we have decided, must be native, of the soil. We ... look about for indigenous musical material for grand opera that will express the spirit of indigenous America; and we conclude that the most pertinent must be the chants of the Indians—the most alien music ethnically that we could hit upon.⁶⁶

Clearly, he would prefer if American composers did not limit their operatic efforts to indigenous materials exclusively. William Saunders was even more plainspoken, insisting, “The simple fact of an opera having an American subject, or an American composer ... does not give that opera the right to be regarded as distinctively American in generic classification.”⁶⁷ Obviously any composer from anywhere in the world was free to employ New-World locales, as indeed they had already been doing as far back as Graun’s *Montezuma*, Rameau’s *Les Indes Galantes* or Gretry’s *Le Huron*.⁶⁸ One could, in Deems Taylor’s opinion, at least get an opera project off to a good start by choosing an indigenous subject. Referring to “our best novelists” (but by extension to opera composers and librettists too), he noted that they “seem purely American—frequently for no other reason than that their subject-matter is American.”⁶⁹ Indeed, for the six works examined here, the use of New-World subjects is one of the most defining features—the fundamental support of their nationalist intentions.

⁶⁶ Steigman, “The Great American Opera,” 364.

⁶⁷ William Saunders, “The American Opera: Has It Arrived?” *Music and Letters* 13 (1932): 150.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of these earlier theatrical works, see Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music*, 29–43.

⁶⁹ Deems Taylor, *Of Men and Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), 130. It is thus perhaps surprising to note that both of Taylor’s operas performed at the Met are set in Europe!

Confronting the European Tradition

When constructing their opera plots, writers found themselves confronted with two competing tendencies. On the one hand was their desire for an indigenous setting and uniquely American action. Counterbalancing this nationalist motivation was the pull of the European tradition. As one might expect with an imported genre, composers and librettists looked to the established European masterpieces for models (see Appendix A). By borrowing certain conventions from the staples of the repertoire, librettists could safely navigate a course between the use of distinctively American ingredients and the need to meet audience and critical expectations, based on their familiarity with the European repertoire, of a generic norm for what opera must be like.

Cadman understood that American opera must build upon the foundations already laid in the successful works from the European performance canon. As he explained in a 1927 interview, “What Puccini has done for Japan in *Madama Butterfly* and Wagner for Germany in *Lohengrin* can be done for the New World by writing opera around historical and legendary themes.”⁷⁰ These works make for a curious pairing. Given that Cadman suggests Puccini’s *Butterfly* as an example, he apparently believes that a composer need not be a native of the land that he is defining operatically, although he would surely not wish to relinquish the title of Great American Opera to Puccini’s *La Fanciulla del West*. Wagner’s *Lohengrin* seems an especially dated model since the work was three-quarters of a century old at the time of Cadman’s remark—hardly the cutting edge of operatic production—but it did still retain a firm place in the repertoire. Rather, the crux of his argument is that American composers should follow the precedents set by an inclusive range of operatic models as they attempt to tackle the genre.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Robert W. Baisley, “Charles Wakefield Cadman: Completely American,” *Music Educators Journal* 61, no. 9 (1975): 58.

Indeed, the six operas examined here reveal a varied array of connections to the operas of the standard repertoire. Borrowed plot elements, dramaturgical devices, and stock set pieces suggest points of contact with the most popular operas of the day, ranging from French Romantic opera to Wagner and contemporary veristic trends.⁷¹

Carmen, *Faust*, and *Aida*—three of the period’s most frequently performed operas—provide a veritable storehouse of stock set-piece types. Whether actively seeking out a specific model or simply recalling the kinds of numbers that had proven effective on stage, a librettist would naturally emulate these precedents. These three works supply the classic examples of how to incorporate material for a soldiers’ chorus, a gypsy chorus, a drinking chorus, a military procession, or pagan religious music. Such numbers do not necessarily advance an opera’s plot, but primarily function to provide either local or exotic “color.” *Natoma*, *The Sacrifice*, and *Azora* each make regular use of these types of borrowed numbers, even if the models are backwards looking in terms of the genre’s development.

In *Natoma*, Redding provides material for a chorus of convent girls, a drinking chorus, and Spanish dances, yet in a more wholesome presentation than in the familiar numbers from *Carmen*. *Natoma*’s convent girls are the chaste and proper version of *Carmen*’s cigarette girls, but both groups make a similar entrance. While they are all eager to flirt with the gathered men upon their arrival, the convent girls maintain a demeanor of propriety, whereas the cigarette girls are more actively seductive (thus giving Bizet the advantage). Likewise, *Natoma*’s Spanish dances occupy a place in the public sphere as part of a civic celebration, in contrast to the

⁷¹ Indeed, Oscar Sonneck recognized that “Meyerbeer, Gounod, and finally Wagner stood godfathers to the more modern American attempts at opera.” See Oscar Sonneck, “Early American Operas,” *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* 6, no. 3 (1905): 485.

private, erotic sultriness of those that Carmen dances for Don José.⁷² Operetta-style stock numbers are an additional influence in *Natoma*. Herbert seemed to always keep one eye on the popular market—sheet music sales in particular—and Redding’s libretto gave him ample opportunities to compose numbers that make for easily extractable solo songs. The serenade sung by Alvarado outside Barbara’s house in the first act is one of several “hits” from the opera. While operatic serenades are generally lighter in tone compared to their surroundings, Alvarado’s text is far removed from the seriousness critics hoped for in American grand opera, even if the same number would have added to the charm of any Herbert operetta:

Oh, my lady-love, oh, my lady-love,
Leave me not in the dusk to repine;
Oh, my lady-love, oh, my lady-love,
Bid me sing to thy beauty divine!⁷³

Surely, some listeners would have detected the similarities of this text to Joseph E. Howard’s popular ragtime song “Good-Bye My Lady Love” (1904). Whatever one’s opinion of this and other incursions from operetta territory, the blend of borrowed elements from the standard operas of the European repertoire and lighter operetta fare, fused together by a through-composed, grand-opera texture, is one of the most characteristic features of both Redding’s libretto and Herbert’s music.

Carmen again casts her shadow over *The Sacrifice*. For no other reason than to apparently add exotic color, Converse introduces a gypsy chorus in the second act. They appear ostensibly to entertain the American soldiers at their camp, but they play no role in advancing the

⁷² Herbert’s biographer Joseph Kaye observes that the title character “was somewhat akin to Aida, and Herbert must have been attracted to the story for that reason. There was also some opportunity for Spanish music, which surely recalled to Herbert the blandishments of *Carmen*.” Given the opera’s success with the public, these connections must have been as appealing to the audience as they were to the composer himself. See Joseph Kaye, *Victor Herbert: The Biography of America’s Greatest Composer of Romantic Music* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1931), 216–7.

⁷³ This excerpt gives only the serenade’s refrain. Redding, *Natoma*, 13.

opera's plot. (The libretto does not clarify if these are specifically Mexican gypsies; perhaps they were stragglers left over from a previous production of *Carmen*.) The same act opens with a substantial soldiers' chorus, as the men ask Corporal Tom Flynn to "Give us a hearty soldier's song."⁷⁴ The textual interplay in this scene, in which the full group responds to the solo role's verses, parallels Mephistopheles' "Round of the Golden Calf" in Gounod's *Faust*. Other conventional numbers include a "flower maiden" song sung by Magdalena, a young Indian girl and a particular favorite with the American soldiers, and the scene known as "Chonita's Prayer," in which the soprano heroine asks for guidance and protection.

Azora finds opportunities to incorporate all of *Aida*'s set pieces in its plot: choruses for the pagan Fire Priests, ceremonial processions, and again choruses for soldiers. The "Festal Processional" that accompanies the entry of Montezuma could surely even reuse some of the same props required to stage *Aida*'s "Triumphal March." This connection did not go unnoticed. *Chicago Tribune* critic Frederick Donaghey, for example, claimed that the cast "found the employment reasonably familiar, the story being an easy, if not facile, rewrite of *Aida*."⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Hadley and Steven's reenactment of faux Aztec rituals is no more or less absurd than are Verdi's imaginary Egyptian rituals. The plot subject itself had been a favorite since the early history of the genre, with Montezuma having already made an appearance in operas by Vivaldi, Graun, Paisiello, Galuppi and Spontini, among others. Hadley's version even shares some similar plot elements with Spontini's *Fernand Cortez*, although it is unlikely that Hadley and his collaborators were familiar with any of these earlier works.⁷⁶ From our vantage point

⁷⁴ Converse and Macy, *The Sacrifice*, 37.

⁷⁵ Frederick Donaghey, "Mr. Hadley's Opera, *Azora*," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 December 1917.

⁷⁶ In Spontini's opera, Montezuma's niece (rather than his daughter as in *Azora*) is romantically involved with Cortez's brother, who, like Xalca in Hadley's opera, is in danger of being made a human sacrifice for this illicit love. Roger Sessions would later pick up the same topic for his own *Montezuma* in 1964. For more information on

today, this score might hardly seem like a candidate for an American National Opera, but note that none of Hadley's contemporaries raised the issue or seemed troubled that the work was not American enough. Instead, the press consistently emphasized the "all-American" aspects of the production.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, one critic who was clearly unimpressed by the whole affair did at least manage to find "some diversion in counting up the number of standard operas with which [Hadley] was on intimate terms."⁷⁸

Nevin's *Poia* is, of the six, the opera most closely aligned with post-Wagnerian trends. Its use of a legendary plot source is not only an early example of what Cadman would later suggest but can also be seen in relationship to the operatic models of Nevin's teacher, Humperdinck. His two most successful operas, *Hansel und Gretel* and *Königskinder*, both treat German folk legends, just as Nevin sets an American Indian legend in *Poia*. In this way, both Humperdinck and Nevin extend the legacy of Wagner by expanding on the range of legendary sources suitable for opera. One particular feature of the plot, taken over from McClintock's retelling, also resonates with the German tradition when it appears in an operatic context. McClintock tells how Episua, the Morning Star, gave to Poia "a magic flute and a wonderful song, with which he would be able to charm the heart of the girl he loved" as a reward for having saved his life.⁷⁹ In the opera, this became a "reed that sings with magic voice / Its song hath charm and witchery / That bids a maiden's soul rejoice."⁸⁰ One cannot help but be reminded of *Die Zauberflöte*.

Montezuma-based operas, see Malena Kuss, "Contributions of the New World to the Music of the Old World," *Acta Musicologica* 63 (1991): 6–8.

⁷⁷ For an example, see "The First Genuinely All-American Operatic Production," *Current Opinion* 64, no. 2 (February 1918): 103 (discussed in chapter two).

⁷⁸ Steigman, "The Great American Opera," 363.

⁷⁹ Walter McClintock, *The Old North Trail; or Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1910), 498.

⁸⁰ Nevin, *Poia*, 110.

Furthermore, the inclusion of a four-movement ballet—one for each of the four seasons—is reminiscent of the lengthy ballet in *Faust* (the most significant ballet sequence of any opera in the standard repertoire at the time). From more recent operas, the “Dance of the Hours” from Ponchielli’s *La Gioconda* and Humperdinck’s incorporation of dance in *Hansel und Gretel* are other potential influences.

With *Narcissa*, on the other hand, Moore and Carr seemed to be looking in the direction of French Grand Opera. Large-scale choral scenes combining numerous strands of separate texts make up a large portion of the opera. The wedding scene and choral hymn that conclude Act I, or the Act II finale which presents the suitably “exotic” spectacle of the peace pipe ceremony with an Indian Sun Dance and song, are notable examples. The opera’s closing massacre scene hearkens all the way back to the finale of *Les Huguenots*. Most impressive is the tableau which concludes the third act. Carr’s text combines as many as seven independent layers: immigrants announce their arrival, Indians perceive that their “fate is sealed,” Delaware Tom highlights the same problem as a solo voice and Waskema adds a mournful cry of “Woe!,” Dr. McLaughlin (chief factor of the British Fort Vancouver) recognizes that the Hudson Bay Company will lose control of the Oregon Territory to the United States, Marcus and Elijah sing of their eminent departure back East to seek governmental assistance for the newly arrived immigrants, and finally Narcissa and Siskadee wish their beloveds a safe journey and sing of their sorrow over their absence.⁸¹ Moore and Carr were clearly aware of more contemporary French opera as well. Their handling of the opening scene of Act II, which enacts a busy day in the life of Fort Vancouver, is strikingly reminiscent of the scenes of Parisian city life depicted in Charpentier’s

⁸¹ The text for this ensemble can be found in Carr, *Cost of Empire*, 19; the complexity of the texture is best observed in the score: Mary Carr Moore, *Narcissa* (New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1912), 201–9.

Louise or Puccini's *La Bohème*. All three works attempt to operatize the regular happenings of an ordinary day in their respective cities.

Verismo and contemporary Italian opera, especially Puccini, is perhaps the strongest influence of all. One needed to look no further than this composer for a model of how to create a new opera that could immediately win a place in the standard repertoire. *Natoma* shares a kinship with *Tosca*, since both women are willing to kill in order to protect those whom they love. *Natoma*'s murder of Alvarado takes place on stage in view of all—spectators and audience members alike—as do many verismo killings and Don José's murder of Carmen. Burton in *The Sacrifice* shares something with *Madama Butterfly*'s Pinkerton in that both are American military men who pursue an ill-fated love interest with a local woman. One might even recognize traces of *La Bohème*'s Mimi (or perhaps *La Traviata*'s Violetta) in the character of Chonita, who, in the third act, becomes the stereotyped weak operatic soprano desperately struggling to stay alive.

Shanewis leans even more heavily on verismo models, particularly *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*. All three works share the same basic structure—two equal halves separated by a brief instrumental intermezzo. *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* both portray the events of a brief span of time, just as *Shanewis* only presents a few hours each from two separate days. That opera's tragic ending, with Philip Harjo's sudden and unprovoked slaying of Lionel who ultimately expires in the arms of Shanewis, might at first seem to be in line with verismo precedents. In an article published shortly after the opera's premiere, Cadman himself claimed "that Bizet, Gounod, Verdi and Mr. Puccini were models worth taking."⁸² Note that his list does

⁸² Charles Cadman, "Some Confessions about Shanewis," *The Violinist* 23 (1918): 353. Critic Mitzi Kolisch wrote disparagingly of "Lionel singing lyrically after the fashion of Pinkerton," but contrary to Cadman's own claim, William Chase mistakenly described the opera as a work "which, definitely 'going native' in character and scene, at last discarded *all foreign models*" (emphasis added). See Mitzi Kolisch, "Why Not an American Opera?"

not reveal the two most direct and obvious models. Perhaps he was trying to misdirect some of his readers away from this connection.

However, as much as one might like to view Cadman's opera as the earliest successful example of American verismo, *Shanewis's* plot does not manage to hold up well to a direct comparison. The plots of all three scores are driven by romantic entanglements that result in death, yet in the two repertoire staples, this dramatic outcome is the product of well-established conflicts which convincingly motivate the characters' actions. Although Canio's murder of Nedda, for instance, is supposed to shock both the on-stage and real-world audiences, one can certainly accept his action as the culmination of a deep-seated suspicion and long-suffering jealousy. In *Shanewis*, on the other hand, the twists in the plot defy all logical expectations. As Michael Pisani sees it, "it would certainly take a special kind of genius for a composer to make convincing some of its significant improbabilities."⁸³ Somehow, the audience must accept that Lionel might fall instantly in love with Shanewis, even though he is at that moment in the presence of his fiancée, Amy. Philip Harjo's motivations are equally suspect. Apparently, his embittered antagonism towards Anglo-Americans is so strong that he is prepared to kill Lionel just for having misled Shanewis and broken her heart. Cadman and Eberhart attempt the same kind of shocking dénouement that ends *Pagliacci*, yet *Shanewis's* climax unfolds so quickly and with such poorly supported motivation, that the audience is left to wonder just how and why

The Independent 115 (15 August 1925): 189; and William B. Chase, "15th Native Opera in Gatti's Regime," *New York Times*, 11 February 1934.

⁸³ Pisani, "Exotic Sounds in the Native Land," 470.

everything could have unraveled so precipitously.⁸⁴ This persistent atmosphere of unbelievability is in fact the opposite of verismo.

Although the inclusion of stock numbers and borrowed plot elements may at first seem to be merely derivative, they carry a much greater significance. These features helped this new and unusual creature—American opera—become a more recognizable and inviting experience for audiences accustomed to the European repertoire. One important goal was to create operas that could comfortably fit alongside the other works in the mainstream repertoire. Thus, it would have been counterproductive to create a product so unique that it would be unrecognizable as an opera libretto. American librettists were working to prove their legitimacy in comparison to their European colleagues, and were thus compelled to fit the norm. The first step towards this recognition was to demonstrate that they too could successfully manipulate the materials and ingredients that make up mainstream opera.

Racial Encounters and Textual Characterization

Turning away from inherited, European elements to indigenous traits, one theme in particular serves as a useful entry point into a discussion of how these librettos convey their specific American qualities. The theme of racial encounter links four of these operas into an interrelated subgroup. By bringing together characters from a diverse collection of ethnicities, the librettists have chosen to employ a tried and tested motivator of operatic plots. Hence the interaction between competing racial groups becomes the underlying force which propels the opera's central conflict. This theme is well represented in some of the period's repertoire staples.

⁸⁴ The 1927 revised version greatly improves the pacing of the Oklahoma part of the opera from what was staged at the Metropolitan, but it fails to correct the faulty character motivation. Both versions were published in piano-vocal score.

Aida, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Carmen* each focus on problematic cross-racial relationships, while in *Samson et Dalila* the illicit relationship crosses both ethnic and religious lines. In these works, however, none of the parties involved come from the group that make up the operas' primary audience. Verdi and Puccini, for instance, deal with Egyptian, Ethiopian, American and Japanese characters instead of Italians; Saint-Saëns and Bizet visit the Middle East and Spain instead of France.

Yet with these American operas, the race issue plays for higher stakes; representations of the audience members themselves are embroiled in these ethnic conflicts. (Admittedly, *Madama Butterfly* plays this way to American audiences.) Here on the operatic stage, attendees encountered history recent enough to remain in living memory, imbued with sore feelings and burdened with a not-so-subtle racism. This was not a proud part of the nation's founding, but an unresolved legacy of disappointment and embarrassment. The romantic entanglements between Anglo-American and Indian characters, especially, would have touched a particularly sensitive nerve, as such interracial relationships were at best frowned upon and at worst condemned outright, if not legally prohibited.⁸⁵ It is one thing to dramatize warfare between ancient Egyptians and Ethiopians—to romanticize a love that crosses social and political barriers—but it is quite another matter when the potential racial mixing involves Americans pitted against

⁸⁵ For a brief history of miscegenation policy in the United States, see Bárbara C. Cruz and Michael J. Berson, "The American Melting Pot? Miscegenation Laws in the United States," *OAH Magazine of History* 15, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 80-82. For a recent book-length study, see Lauren L. Basson, *White Enough to Be American? Race Mixing, Indigenous People, and the Boundaries of State and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

Elise Lemire, *"Miscegenation": Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) examines how the issue was treated in 19th-century literature. For studies on cinematic approaches to the issue, including in films contemporary with the operas discussed here, see Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903-1967* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005) and Gregory S. Jay, "'White Man's Book No Good': D. W. Griffith and the American Indian," *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 3-26.

Spanish Californians or Indians, when the man involved in the unacceptable relationship could be one's neighbor, brother or son.

In *Natoma*, Lieutenant Paul Merrill crosses the racial line twice. In the opening act of the opera, Paul is entranced by Natoma's physical beauty and exotic otherness as she sings a lengthy narrative describing her Indian heritage. Yet Natoma perceives that once Paul lays eyes on the Spanish aristocrat Barbara, he will forget all about her and instead love Barbara. Natoma's prediction proves correct, and Paul enters into a second racial encounter, this time with the daughter of the man then in control of the California territory. (Barbara's father, Don Francisco de la Guerra, to use his full name as given in the libretto, is described as "a noble Spaniard of the old regime."⁸⁶) Captain Burton, another American outsider in Spanish California, finds himself similarly drawn to a local inhabitant, Chonita, although here the libretto specifically describes her as a Mexican. Lionel's attraction to Shanewis is even more problematic because of the opera's contemporary setting and because he leaves his white fiancée behind when he follows Shanewis to the reservation. Here Lionel's two loves represent opposite and irreconcilable cultures—Amy symbolizes the modern America from which Lionel comes, while Shanewis offers an alternative Indian way of life. Only Shanewis is able to navigate between the two spheres because of her training as an operatic soprano; she draws Lionel away from his "correct" place in society.⁸⁷

Noting that "these operas do not relate founding myths of the nation [but instead] tell of recent or contemporary encounters at the last American frontier," James Parakilas offers one

⁸⁶ Redding, *Natoma*, 5.

⁸⁷ For a related viewpoint on the dynamics between Amy, Shanewis, and Lionel, see Kris A. Bjerke, "Perspectives of the Operas of Charles Wakefield Cadman" (M.M. thesis, Bowling Green University, 1992), 57–60.

explanation of how audiences might have perceived the underlying racial message conveyed through these relationships:

[T]hey define an ongoing, unsettled process of racial encounter as the American national experience. In a sense they symbolically enact all the interracial relationships in American society of the day, including black-white relationships and encounters of native-born Americans with the largest influx of immigrants the country had ever experienced—an influx concentrated in the northeastern cities where these operas were first performed.⁸⁸

Opera audiences would surely have been cognizant of this parallel, as the opera world had witnessed at first hand the impact of immigration. One need only consider the shifting repertoire and divided clientele of the New York's Metropolitan Opera, with its immigrant-dominated audiences and sometimes separate conductors for Germanic versus non-Germanic repertoire.

Although critics were rarely explicit about their discomfort with these touchy racial thematic elements, one can get a sense of what they must have been thinking from their generalized statements about their dislike of operatic Indians. We have already encountered this thread in some of the anti-Indianist criticisms discussed above. Mitzi Kolisch, to give one more example, barely attempts to camouflage her scorn of *Shanewis* when she calls the opera “a blazing example of the people about which an American composer should not weave his music.”⁸⁹ Kolisch surely has both the murderous Indian Philip Harjo and the race-breaking Lionel equally in mind. In Kris Bjerke's reading of the plot, she suggests that Lionel's death must have seemed “acceptable” from both the White and Indian perspective “because of his relationship with an Indian.”⁹⁰ Seen in this light, the librettists' decisions to focus on cross-racial romances are bravely progressive, anticipating such later works as *Show Boat* or *South Pacific*.

⁸⁸ James Parakilas, “The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter, Part II” *Opera Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1994): 54–5.

⁸⁹ Kolisch, “Why Not an American Opera?” 189.

⁹⁰ Bjerke, “Perspectives of the Operas of Cadman,” 59.

Despite these unsettling undercurrents, the librettists in general offer a sympathetic portrayal of their Indian characters, yet one conditioned by the time's prevailing notions about the nation's ethnic hierarchy and cultural evolution. In each opera, the librettists painstakingly characterize their operatic Indians through the content of their sung lyrics. These texts tend to capitalize upon the understanding that Indians, as a more "primitive" people, are closely connected to and sympathetic with the earth.⁹¹ Thus, their lyrics are consistently enriched with extended metaphors built around nature imagery.

The following series of text excerpts illustrates this theme. In the choral dirge which opens Act III of *Poia*, a nature metaphor forms the core of a lament sung by solo male voices while the remainder of the chorus hums in harmony:

Weary and old is our mother, the world,
And weak are the children she bears in her age.
The tribe is a forest of dying trees.
Our arrows no longer fly true;
And the beasts are more crafty than we.
What profits the chase when the hunter to failure is doom'd?
What reason to strive when the striving wins only despair!⁹²

In Act IV of *Narcissa*, as the Indian maid Siskadee mourns the death of her beloved Elijah, son of the Indian chief Yellow Serpent, her sadness again finds its reflection in the natural world:

Woe! Woe!
No more my Chief beside me rides,
With grief my heart forever bides,

⁹¹ Marsha Bol has produced a lavishly illustrated coffee table-sized book that examines this topic, drawing upon materials from Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Natural History. She has also edited a collection of essays that includes an exploration of the historical roots of Indian Earth-connectedness in mythology, custom, and religious practice. See Marsha C. Bol, *North, South, East, West: American Indians and the Natural World*, with photographs by Tom Barr (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 1998) and Marsha C. Bol, ed., *Stars Above, Earth Below: American Indians and Nature* (Boulder, Colo.: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1998). In particular, see her contribution to the volume, "Nature as a Model for American Indian Societies: An Overview," 231–54.

⁹² Nevin, *Poia*, 117–9. Eugenie von Huhn's German translation reads: "Müde und alt, unsre Mutter, die Erde, und schwach die Kinder, die im Alter sie gebärt. Einem sterbenden Walde gleicht unser Stamm. Unsre Pfeile, sie treffen nicht mehr; und die Tiere sind klüger als wir. Was nützt uns die Jagd, wenn der Jäger zum Unglück verdammt? Warum sich bemüh'n, wenn die Mühe nur Mißerfolg lohnt!"

Nor cares what other woe betides.
 Woe! Woe! Woe!
 For me no more the song of bird.
 Woe! Woe!
 Yon silent mountain heights I'll tread,
 Where tempest thunders crash o'erhead,
 And snows their milk-white blanket spread,
 There with my love my soul has fled.
 Woe! Woe! Woe!⁹³

In Natoma's Act III revenge prayer to her god Manitou, natural phenomena take on a more violent form, as she describes her momentary desire to escape from her enforced sanctuary in the mission church and reclaim her position as an Indian tribal chief's daughter:

Manitou! Hear me!
 I have awakened!
 I will go to my people.
 The voice of my father is calling,
 "This land is ours!"
 We will rush from out the mountain
 Like the lightning, like the thunder,
 Every stranger and his house
 Shall lie buried 'neath our anger.
 In my breast I hold the token,
 And the gift shall be unbroken
 From the Spirit to his people.⁹⁴

Shanewis applies the nature metaphor directly to herself. She twice connects her own life to that of wild birds, first in her introductory "Spring Song of the Robin Woman":

Oh, ye birds of spring,
 Come from your hiding;
 Robins all and humming-birds,
 Come unto this barren land.
 Here the waters gliding
 From the melting ice and snow;
 Salmon leap unto my hand,
 Call ye springtime to the land,
 Call ye verdure to the hills,

⁹³ Carr, *The Cost of Empire*, 22–3. Siskadee's Lament makes up one thread of the multi-layered, Grand Opera-style texture of this scene.

⁹⁴ Redding, *Natoma*, 27.

Wake the blossoms by the rills.
Humming birds and robins all,
Ha yu! Ha yu! Come unto my call!⁹⁵

Soon thereafter, Shanewis makes the metaphor even more explicit, as she attempts to explain herself to the newly attentive Lionel:

I am a bird of the wilderness,
I am a thrush of the woodland,
Captive awhile to art and song
Yet true to my traditions.
I love the wild life of the plains,
The campfires of my people...
Ah, if you think you love me,
Go with me to my home,
Learn to know my people.⁹⁶

When similar bird imagery occurs in one of Barbara's arias from *Natoma*, on the other hand, it depicts a more generic natural world, lacking the kind of personal resonance which characterizes the Indian texts. Instead, Barbara's text draws upon themes common to the nineteenth-century parlor ballad:

I list the trill in golden throat
Of yonder bird on wing afloat,
Bearing the message far and near,
Awake my love the Spring is here!
...
Fly forth, ye minions of the sky!
Our happiness sing out on high,
Bearing the message far and near:
Awake, my love, the Spring is here!⁹⁷

Throughout these libretti, intensely personal identification with nature is reserved for the Indian characters alone and is the clearest indicator of how the librettists sought to define Indianness.

⁹⁵ Eberhart, *Shanewis*, 6. The excerpt gives only the first stanza of the song's text.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁷ Redding, *Natoma*, 22. This excerpt gives the first and last stanzas of her song.

The second major area of Indian characterization involves the concept of Indians as a “vanishing race.”⁹⁸ This widespread belief held that through continued assimilation, declining population, and ever-growing White Westward expansion, Indians would soon cease to exist as a distinct population group. (The concept goes hand-in-hand with the idea of American “Manifest Destiny.”) The texts assigned to operatic Indians convey an awareness of the supposed inevitability of this outcome, covering an emotional spectrum from resigned acceptance to outright rage. Chonita’s Indian servant Tomasa provides the earliest example in a prophetic aria near the beginning of *The Sacrifice*. As with the texts discussed above, her sentiments are again bound up with the impact White expansion has on the natural world:

I know the sign.
 ’Tis the march of races.
 ...Shadows of evil
 Chilled [our] soul, as [we] heard how the White-man
 Was destined of old to come from the East-land,
 Surging with fatal power o’er the mountains,
 Crushing and driving before him the Red-man...
 ...
 Fare Thee well, wild blooming West-land!
 Teeming Wilderness! Mother of Freedom!
 Ruthless hands, for greed of gold,
 Shall rend thine ancient sacred beauty.
 Fare Thee well, wild blooming West-land!
 The world is upon Thee. Fare Thee well!⁹⁹

The educated but anti-White character Delaware Tom echoes a similar viewpoint in Act II of *Narcissa*:

For now your tribes in peace you lead, now, while the land is wide
 enough for all; but like resounding miles of buffalo, or floods when

⁹⁸ The term itself gained no greater currency than through the visual arts, especially the paintings and sculptures of Frederic Remington and the photographs of Edward S. Curtis. See, for instance, Christopher M. Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) or Brian W. Dippie, “Photographic Allegories and Indian Destiny,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 40–57.

⁹⁹ Converse and Macy, *The Sacrifice*, 22.

summer breathes on the snow, the armies of the white man march.
The red man's lands they'll take, his pastures spoil. His game will
flee, his cattle starve; and he will perish, die, as dies the dog!¹⁰⁰

Again, a personal identification with nature is apparent, yet here these sentiments are bound up with grief over their impending loss.

In presenting the Indians as a vanishing race, the librettists remain ambivalent in their stance towards the issue. They sympathize with the suffering of the tribes and genuinely lament the widespread cultural loss, yet at the same time they advance a belief in the benefits that accompany White progress and expansion. Redding explicitly designed the character of Natoma to be representative of this two-sided perspective. He wrote that "Natoma is somewhat allegorical in that she epitomizes the pathos and heartache of the disappearing race as against the influx of the Aryan tribes."¹⁰¹ The flip side of the coin is shown in the opera's ultimate resolution. Natoma in the end forsakes her ancestral religion and her claim as heir to leadership of her tribe. Instead, she accepts Christianity and chooses to remain within the safety of the convent as a nun. Paul, who in the opera's first scene was momentarily smitten with the exotic Natoma, ends up with the Spanish aristocrat Barbara. Paul is thus revealed as the symbolic inheritor of the California that first belonged to the Indians and later the Spanish. Herbert's biographer Edward Waters, no fan of the opera's plot in general, finds this "ironic" ending to be "typically American: an American officer wins his girl, and an Indian is chosen to be the sacrifice."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Carr, *The Cost of Empire*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Letter dated 5 November 1909, quoted in Edward N. Waters, *Victor Herbert: A Life in Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 375.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 382.

If in Redding's plot, Indians are put in their place (Natoma is safely isolated in a convent) and the Spanish become the beneficiaries of American progress (through the union of Barbara to Paul), then Converse seems to offer an alternative resolution to the same problem in *The Sacrifice*. This comes about through the death of the American protagonist, Burton. In James Parakilas's view, "the soldier is giving up a fantasy of cultural arrogance—the fantasy that in escaping into the arms of an exotic woman he is bestowing the blessings of his culture on her—and his death serves to expiate the guilt that the American audience has been asked to feel for this arrogance."¹⁰³ Parakilas may overstate the case for "guilt expiation." Burton does give up his "fantasy," yet one might also detect a moralistic example of American magnanimity in the plot's resolution. Burton rises above the animosities of the present war between the Mexicans and the Americans and is able to relinquish his own desire for Chonita. Through his death, he instead grants the Mexican lovers Bernal and Chonita the kind of "happy ending" achieved by Paul and Barbara in *Natoma*. Thus his actions can be seen as noble and honorable, characteristics possessed by the American Burton but not by the Mexican Bernal, whom it must be remembered has conspired to ambush and kill the American soldiers in an effort to rescue Chonita.

What Parakilas sees as "cultural arrogance" is simply a manifestation of the typical, early 20th-century views of patriotism, national destiny, and the ideals of American expansion and progress. The librettists consistently express these sentiments through texts for their White male characters, the appropriate outlet for such patriarchal sentiments, while their Western settings provide a fitting locale for a nationalist acclamation. Three passages—sung by Paul in *Natoma*, Burton in *The Sacrifice*, and Marcus in *Narcissa*—are the most explicitly patriotic lyrics found anywhere in these works. Paul's heroic aria in Act II of *Natoma* begins with a tribute to the

¹⁰³ Parakilas, "The Soldier and the Exotic, Part II," 61.

ruling Spanish by praising Christopher Columbus but ends with the declaration that the Americans bring the true fulfillment of Columbus's mission to the New World:

No country can my own outvie
In tribute to the one
Who held the flag of Spain on high
Toward the setting sun.
His noble figure stands apart
In sacred trust to hold;
Upon our shield, upon our heart,
His name is stamped in gold.
Columbus! Led on by hand divine,
Columbus! My country's love is thine!

...
The spirit that directed thee,
Great Captain, safe to shore,
Is goddess of our Liberty,
Whose name we all adore.
Columbia! Bright Goddess of the free!
Columbia! We pledge our love to thee!¹⁰⁴

Note the shift from "Columbus" at the end of the first stanza to "Columbia" in the final lines of the aria. The meaning here is synonymous with United States. Paul might respect the original Spanish settlers of California, but the American commitment to liberty is what really receives his "pledge" of love.

In a passage sung to Chonita in Act I of *The Sacrifice*, Converse gives Burton a text that builds upon the same theme:

You and your languid happy race
Fed from nature's gen'rous hand,
Idly gazing o'er your vineyards,
Golden fields and teeming meadows
Guarded by your stern Sierras.

...
Long in tranquil ease and pleasure
You have guarded Nature's storehouse;
Never knowing how the Old World,
Chafing, boisterous in its confines,

¹⁰⁴ Redding, *Natoma*, 23.

Surging o'er with restless vigor,
Must at last o'erflow its barriers.

...

Stronger natures must protect you,
Surer hands must guide the helm.
You must trust in us to guard you,
We who come with honest purpose
Here, to bring out of this turmoil
Lasting peace and nobler justice,
Better planned for mightier progress.¹⁰⁵

Note the consistent use of comparative adjectives: Americans are “stronger,” “surer,” “nobler,” “better,” and “mightier.” The Mexicans were able to appreciate the beauties of California, but only the Americans can fulfill the true potential of the land.

Elsewhere, Marcus Whitman presents similar sentiments in Carr's libretto for *Narcissa*. This might at first seem inconsistent with her sympathetic view of the Indian condition and her feminist point of view, yet Carr's intended title for the opera, *The Cost of Empire*, provides the key to understanding this passage. In her historical outlook, England, which controlled the Oregon Territory as an extension of Canada at the time of the opera's events, was the more pressing rival, not the Indians. She presents the deaths of the Whitmans and the end of the Indian way of life as costs of the expanding American empire, necessary to preserve the Oregon Territory as part of the Union. Marcus gives voice to what Carr and Moore perceived as a noble calling in an Act III monologue, which again conveys the idea that only the Americans are capable of truly capitalizing on the region's resource potentials. It is significant that *Narcissa* is on the receiving end of Marcus's masculine display of patriotism:

Those that inherit land all worn and spoiled, know naught of this
great world, new-made from the hand of God, this vast, unowned,
uncomprehended West, where mount and sky are mirrored in a
thousand lakes and streams; where forests crown the hills, and
buried treasures wait the blast; where many a riven rock,

¹⁰⁵ Converse and Macy, *The Sacrifice*, 29.

remembering still its fiery birth, presents its harsh, defying face to
man; where sleeps the soul or myriad harvests with no plough to
wake, no hand to plant. And England this vast empire wins if I
falter now.¹⁰⁶

In the texts sung by both Burton and Marcus, exploitation of natural resources is the primary objective. This exploitative approach to land use is the polar opposite of the nature-connectedness encountered in the Indian texts.¹⁰⁷ These libretti seem to suggest that while the loss of the Indian way of life is to be pitied, American progress, which takes full advantage of the resources the natural world can offer, is a goal worth striving for. In an era before environmentalism and conservationism, one can be sure that the original audiences felt the same way. By enacting stories related to the growth and expansion of the nation, these operas each offered plots that attempted to resonate with an audience's sense of patriotism.

The plot of *Azora*, although set in Aztec Mexico and only including European characters in the final tableaux, symbolically enacts the same ideal of progress and expansion. Papan is the first to comprehend the coming changes, as she relates in a dream narrative:

Behold! There stood upon the brink
A glorious Youth in garments white...
And on his gracious brow there stood the figure of a Cross.
And as I gazed, he spake.
“Not yet, it is not time!” he cried,
“For thou hast yet to learn the love of God,
Ere thou shalt cross the River!”
And speaking thus, he turned me toward the east,
And there upon the waters I beheld
Great ships that bore a host of men.
Aloft they held bright banners,
And lo! on every ensign shone

¹⁰⁶ Carr, *The Cost of Empire*, 19. The chorus echoes the same sentiment at the end of the act, singing “We’ve come to take possession of this land, / This new, unclaimed domain; / To build a State, to build a State! / Our country’s flag sustain” (Ibid.).

¹⁰⁷ For a further consideration of this issue, see N. Scott Momaday, “Native American Attitudes to the Environment,” 3–14, and Shepard Crech III, “Ecology, Conservation, and the Buffalo Jump,” in *Stars Above, Earth Below*, 139–65.

The figure of a cross! Then spake the Youth:
“Behold! The Warriors of God are they,
The one Great God of all,
And bring His word unto thy race.
Therefore, return; relate what thou hast heard,
And behold! this is the message thou shalt bear:
‘All gods but One forsake,
And cease thy rites unhallowed.
There is no other God save Him on High,
And Christ the only Sacrifice!’”¹⁰⁸

Unlike the Indian characters discussed above who either rage against or accept with resignation the oncoming wave of White westward expansion, Papan foresees in her dream that it is necessary to abandon the Aztec traditions of human sacrifice and instead turn to Christianity. Now the stakes of racial encounter are raised to the spiritual plane. Those who side with the arriving conquistadors—Papan, Azora, and Xalca—are on the side of progress. The librettist Stevens seems to suggest that the act of welcoming Cortez and his soldiers is intertwined with the acceptance of Christianity. Through a rejection of the ancestral Aztec religion, these characters symbolically align themselves with the same goals of American progress already expressed in the earlier patriotic texts from *Natoma*, *The Sacrifice*, and *Narcissa*.

Puccini’s American Libretto

Of the six operas examined here, none are directly based upon material that had already succeeded in dramatic form. As if the librettists did not already have enough of a challenge in arriving at an acceptably national style of sung text, they seem to have complicated their efforts by needing in addition to craft an original plot that would compellingly hold the stage. None of the six could claim anywhere near the level of theatrical experience that a professional playwright might have offered. Puccini’s attempt at an American-themed opera in *La Fanciulla*

¹⁰⁸ David Stevens, *Azora: The Daughter of Montezuma* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1917), 15.

del West (1910) provides an instructive comparison.¹⁰⁹ His initial task when planning a new opera was to find an appropriate subject. As with his previous two operas, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini again found his source in a successful stage play. In all three cases, each plot subject had already proved its theatricality. Thus, before even composing a note, he could depend on his operas' plots to be stage-worthy and dramatically effective. Twice he latched onto the work of American playwright David Belasco, for *Butterfly* and *La Fanciulla*, and one can only wonder why American composers at this time failed to follow Puccini's lead in considering either Belasco's other plays or the works of other American stagewriters.¹¹⁰

As with *Natoma*, *The Sacrifice*, and *Narcissa*, Puccini selected a plot situated in the nation's West while this territory was still part of the country's untamed frontier. His work is set against the backdrop of the California gold rush. The three subsequent Western operas by American composers present complimentary historical periods: the Spanish Mission years in *Natoma*, the Mexican-American War in *The Sacrifice*, and White immigration across the Oregon Trail in *Narcissa*. However, while many of these American composers or librettists held a direct personal connection to either the territory or the peoples of their opera subjects, Puccini's method did not require first hand familiarity with the lives and landscape of the West. He approached his gold miners and saloon setting just like any other exotic subject, as John Paul Russo explains: "He knew next to nothing of the West, had no desire to go there, and seemed

¹⁰⁹ The authoritative study of this opera with a particular focus on its relationship to the American scene is Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini and The Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Note that Puccini never claimed to be writing an "American opera"—this was simply hyperbole invented in the obsessively interested press coverage devoted to the work's premiere—but rather that he was writing a "Puccini opera" based upon an American plot with American characters.

¹¹⁰ For information on Puccini's collaboration with Belasco, see Shelby J. Davis, "David Belasco and Giacomo Puccini: Their Collaborations," 129–39, and Roxana Stuart, "Uncle Giacomo's Cabin: David Belasco's Direction of *La Fanciulla del West*," 140–8, in John L. DiGaetani and Josef P. Sirefman, eds., *Opera and the Golden West: The Past, Present, and Future of Opera in the U.S.A.* (Cranbury, N. J.: Associated University Presses, 1994). The work's "Americanness" is discussed in Thomas Warburton, "Puccini's *Fanciulla* as Exemplar for American Composers," 149–58, in *ibid.* This chapter includes a comparison of Puccini's *Fanciulla* with Cadman's *Shanewis*.

prepared to believe what he was told about it. His always amazing lack of curiosity, which extended to most things but usually exempted librettos, did not fail him in this instance.”¹¹¹ Indeed, his most direct contact with the subject matter involved attending a performance of Bullafo Bill’s Wild West Show in Milan in 1890 and seeing Belasco’s original play on stage. He was marginally more curious on the musical front, as his compositional preparation included studying “American music of the 1850s as well as some Native American music.” Randall and Davis suggest that Puccini examined these musical sources because he “wanted to understand better the workings of a vastly different culture.”¹¹² However, given his similar use of Japanese melodies in *Butterfly*, Puccini was likely aiming towards a localized musical foundation rather than any attempt at what could truly be considered “cultural understanding.”¹¹³

Puccini’s two Indian characters, Billy Jackrabbit and Wowkle (his “squaw” as she is called in the libretto), are minor roles in the opera’s plot. Their only significant scene opens the second act. In addition to their dialogue, each character is given a quatrain—an aria at its most miniature—which can be compared to the Indian texts analyzed above. In their Italian-language originals, these texts are notably lacking in Indianist traits. Wowkle begins the scene with a lullaby sung to her infant child. The text, given below in the original Italian and a parallel literal translation, is generic, simplistic and repetitive:

¹¹¹ John Paul Russo, “Puccini, the Immigrants, and the Golden West,” *Opera Quarterly* 7 (1990): 20.

¹¹² Randall and Davis, *Puccini and The Girl*, 54. Puccini explored published versions of transcribed Indian melodies, including Carlos Troyer’s arrangements published by the Wa-Wan Press. Puccini preferred reading about his subjects and settings rather than visiting them in person. For a thorough inquiry into the musical sources consulted by Puccini in his preparation for *La Fanciulla*, see Allan W. Atlas, “Belasco and Puccini: ‘Old Dog Tray’ and the Zuni Indians,” *The Musical Quarterly* 75 (1991): 362–98.

¹¹³ A discussion of Puccini’s use of Japanese musical materials can be found in Arthur Groos, “Cio-Cio-San and Sadayakko: Japanese Music-Theater in *Madama Butterfly*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 54 (1999): 41–73.

Il mio bimbo è grande e piccino,
è piccino e stà dentro la cuna,
è grande e tocca la luna,
tocca la luna col suo ditino.

My baby is big and he is little,
he is little and he is in his cradle.
He is big and he touches the moon,
he touches the moon with his little finger.

Nothing here specifically defines Wowkle's identity as an Indian. However, R. H. Elkin, in the English translation from the official Metropolitan Opera libretto sold to the audience at the world premiere, purposely alters the meaning of the original text in order to make this an *Indian* lullaby:

Grant, O Sungod, grant thy protection,
Guard this innocent infant sleeping,
Starry guardian, ever joyful,
Faithful Moongod, ever watchful.¹¹⁴

The tone of this deliberate invocation of the sun, stars and moon is an exact match with similar passages sung by Poia, Natoma, Tomasa, and other Indian characters. Here is a cosmological extension of the same type of connectedness to the natural world found in the Indian texts previously discussed.

A similarly altered translation accompanies Billy Jackrabbit's quatrain. His text is ostensibly a stanza of a hymn paraphrased from Isaiah 40:6–7. Billy is singing in anticipation of his church wedding to Wowkle planned for the following day, with Wowkle joining him in unison on the second and fourth lines:

Come fil d'erba è il giorno
che all'uomo die' il Signor:
scende l'inverno al piano,
l'uomo intristisce e muor!

Like a blade of grass are the days
the Lord has given to man.
When winter descends upon the plain
man droops and dies.

¹¹⁴ Carlo Zangarini and Guelfo Civinini, *La Fanciulla del West*, trans. R. H. Elkin (New York: Franco Colombo, 1910), 31.

Elkin's translation again sacrifices literalness in favor of Indian characterization. He minimizes the biblical connection, heightens the nature metaphor, and renders the lines in pidgin English, as he does with the rest of the dialogue between the two Indians in this scene:

My days are as um grass
Or as um faded flow'r
Um wintry winds sweep o'er um plain,
We perish in um hour.¹¹⁵

The use of pidgin English here connects to the stereotypes encountered in dime novels or staged melodramas. In their effort to maintain an appropriately operatic seriousness, the Indian texts written for American operas intentionally avoid this decidedly low-brow connotation. Yet discounting Elkin's use of dialect, his altered translation again brings this text closer in line with the Indian lyrics encountered in operas from throughout the decade. This correspondence, resulting from the efforts of the American translator rather than the original Italian librettists, suggests that there may have indeed been an emergent, recognized expectation for how dramatized Indians ought to speak.

Critics on the Attack

The standard narrative for why each of these operas never managed to enter the repertoire implies that, without exception, weak and awkward libretti sabotaged the theatrical viability of these operas. One frequently encounters present-day historians who repeat this blanket assertion wholesale. The *New Grove* article on Victor Herbert, for instance, includes the comment that *Natoma*'s "premiere in 1911 enjoyed only a succès d'estime, mainly because of the weakness of Joseph Redding's book."¹¹⁶ Barrymore Scherer's recent textbook on American music likewise

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁶ Steven Ledbetter, "Herbert, Victor," in *Grove Music Online*, <www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

asserts that most operas from the period “were composed to impossibly poor libretti whose stilted ‘operatic’ English was hard to sing and even harder to understand.”¹¹⁷ Even writers sympathetic to the music and style of the period accept the standard narrative. Nicholas Tawa, for example, explains that “As was usual in American opera, an inexperienced writer supplied a weak libretto” (emphasis added).¹¹⁸

The urge to vilify the librettists does in fact originate in the earliest critical assessments of these operas.¹¹⁹ In the opponent’s corner, none was more ready to attack a poor-quality libretto than the fearsome music critic of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Henry Krehbiel. When *Natoma* was first produced in Philadelphia, Herbert biographer Neil Gould explains, “The only New York critic to attend was Herbert’s old bête noir Krehbiel, who apparently couldn’t wait for the chance to savage his favorite.”¹²⁰ Krehbiel recounts his experience in the book *More Chapters of Opera*, where he provides a three page exegesis on the perceived absurdities of *Natoma*’s plot. He enumerates several twists which indeed demand more than the usual suspension of disbelief, such as the leap in logic necessary to accept why *Natoma* is driven to kill Alvarado “for attempting to do what he could not possibly have done under the circumstances surrounding him. He seeks to abduct a lady seated between her father and lover in a public place at a popular festival, with a squad of American sailors with drawn cutlasses in the background and the plaza

¹¹⁷ Barrymore L. Scherer, *A History of American Classical Music* (Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, 2007), 89.

¹¹⁸ Tawa in this instance is writing specifically about *Azora*, a work in which he finds that Hadley supplied “excellent music considering the handicaps faced.” Nicholas Tawa, *Mainstream Music of Early Twentieth Century America: The Composers, Their Times, and Their Works* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 84.

¹¹⁹ Hervé Lacombe, writing of nineteenth-century French opera, explains, “Many columnists were more literary than musical figures, and they enjoyed writing criticism of the many librettos that were open to attack.” The same is surely true for American critics at the beginning of the twentieth century too. For professional writers, a libretto’s text will always be easier to disparage than a complex musical composition. See Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 70.

¹²⁰ Neil Gould, *Victor Herbert: A Theatrical Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 414.

crowded with soldiers.” He feigns total confusion and places the blame squarely on Redding’s text: “How it all comes about might be a little plainer if the opera were written in a language which would compel studious application for an hour to the libretto.” In Krehbiel’s opinion, the libretto is so weak and the plot so outrageous, that it is not even worth the effort of trying to understand what is going on. If it weren’t for Herbert’s music, Krehbiel complains, “The people would move about like marionettes without motive, uttering words which would be intolerable to people of sensibilities because they would probably be understood.” He found relief in that fact that the singers were regularly “smothered by the instrumental voices” making the “inanity” of the libretto only audibly “obvious at intervals.”¹²¹

Regarding *Azora*, Krehbiel sounds almost pleased to report than “its life on the stage, limited to a single performance, was unusually brief even for an American work.”¹²² Apparently he is referring to the single New York performance staged by the touring Chicago Opera Association; he conveniently neglects to mention the three performances given during the regular Chicago season.¹²³ He was no more generous with *Shanewis*: “The plot of the opera was generally voted about the stupidest that could be conceived for such a purpose.”¹²⁴ Rivaling Krehbiel’s flair for withering criticism, B. M. Steigman, in an ironic and satirical piece from 1925 on the “Great American Opera,” pursues a similar line of attack against *Shanewis*. He explains that while the opera was “complimented for its ‘simplicity’ by critics who did not care to be too outspoken about its crude lyrics, its attempts at colloquial English..., when turned into

¹²¹ Krehbiel, *More Chapters of Opera*, 231–2.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 396.

¹²³ See Ronald L. Davis, *Opera in Chicago* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966), 293–4, and Robert C. Marsh and Norman Pellegrini, *150 Years of Opera in Chicago* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 80.

¹²⁴ Krehbiel, *More Chapters of Opera*, 412.

opera, really sounded like burlesque.” He even found the Amy-Lionel-Shanewis love triangle to be “possibly the most stupid in the realm of opera.”¹²⁵ Of all the erudite idioms that a music critic might employ, note that Krehbiel and Steigman both choose the superlative of “stupid.” Finally, some of the harshest anti-libretto invective of all appeared in Frederick Donaghey’s *Chicago Tribune* review of *Azora*. The critic opined, “If there be a worse libretto than that of *Azora*, it is not readily accessible. It would, divorced from the music, classify as what a literate chemist would, doubtless, term para-opera. That is, something that is not really opera, but is the result of opera.”¹²⁶

Perhaps the clearest case of a long-running, systematic libretto/librettist disparagement occurs in the treatment that Joseph Redding has received at the hands of Herbert biographers, ranging from contemporaries of Redding and Herbert up to the present day. Despite the satisfaction that Redding clearly derived from his task, Herbert’s biographers have judged his efforts with dismissive harshness. Joseph Kaye, writing in 1931, found only “unbelievably putrid verse” in Redding’s text, while Neil Gould, from 2008, sees him as the “fatal influence” that prevented the opera from becoming an enduring success.¹²⁷ Claire Lee Purdy, writing in 1944, is willing to credit Redding’s “aptitude for the dramatic” but in the end finds that “he was not a

¹²⁵ Steigman, “The Great American Opera,” 362.

¹²⁶ Note, however, that he ultimately did concede that “Mr. Hadley’s nine-tenths of it makes it worth your attention.” He was in fact a fan of the opera overall, finding that “this eager and fecund troubadour has put a great deal of good music into *Azora*, and, in doing it, has exposed an unsuspected flair for theater. Whenever his score is free from the exactions of the words, it is brilliant, colorful, rich and vividly effective.” Donaghey’s comment that “a worse libretto is not readily accessible” must not be taken out of context, as if it applies to the entire work rather than just one aspect of it. See Donaghey, “Mr. Hadley’s Opera,” *Chicago Tribune*, 27 December 1917.

¹²⁷ Kaye, *Herbert Biography*, 218 and Gould, *Victor Herbert*, 406. Elsewhere, Barrymore Scherer describes Redding’s “racially patronizing melodramatic plot and risible, highfalutin language” which “doomed *Natoma* to eventual oblivion.” See Scherer, *A History of American Classical Music*, 90.

poet, with a poet's fine ear for the beautiful sound of words."¹²⁸ Edward Waters, from 1955, seems more disappointed than angry:

Improbable as most opera plots are, melodramatic and thunderous as they may be, the story of *Natoma* seems uniquely feeble because it has nothing for which one can feel sympathy and no character who appears even slightly credible. Redding, who had labored with exceeding care, produced a book the effects of which were in inverse ratio to his hopes and ambitions.¹²⁹

Surely there is something of a protectionist motivation at work here. A Herbert biographer would naturally prefer not to blame the composer for *Natoma*'s lack of continuing success, thus the librettist makes for an easy scapegoat. In the end, however, the composer alone must bear the responsibility for setting a weak text to music. Only John Tasker Howard and Joseph Kaye are able concede as much. Howard concluded that Herbert "lacked the literary and dramatic judgment and taste necessary to selecting a work suited to serious treatment on the opera stage."¹³⁰ Kaye echoed the sentiment, although not without a final implied blow at poor Redding: "Any Broadway tuner would think twice before committing his music to such words. That Herbert accepted these lyrics could only indicate that he was completely indifferent to literary values—or that he lacked discrimination."¹³¹

But are these American librettos really that much weaker than the texts for many operas that can sustain a strong position in the standard repertoire? Certainly some contemporary writers were not convinced that the lyrics and plots were as ineffective as many critics liked to suggest. Again, *Natoma* can serve as an instructive example. An anonymous reviewer writing in *The*

¹²⁸ Claire Lee Purdy, *Victor Herbert: American Music-Master* (New York: Julian Messner, 1944), 202.

¹²⁹ Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 382.

¹³⁰ John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music: Three Hundred Years of It* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1931), 586.

¹³¹ Kaye, *Herbert Biography*, 219.

Independent noted that the opera could not “have succeeded if the libretto had been as unsatisfactory as most of the critics said it was. Abusing the libretto is a favorite amusement of the musical journalists; it is so easy to take a few detached verses and make fun of them.”¹³² H. J. Whigham, a contributor to *Town & Country Magazine*, tried to help his readers keep Redding’s libretto in perspective. He was mindful of the fact “that Massenet and other foreign composers have often had to put up with just that sort of thing.”¹³³ These comments allow for a more nuanced view of the numerous critical barbs aimed at librettists. First, even a weak libretto can be elevated by great music; the standard repertoire offers plenty of examples of this. Second, one must remember that the 1910s mark the first decade in which American music critics had regular opportunities to critique the world premieres of new operas. Inexperience seeks an outlet through which to prove its validity. As critics sought to establish their credentials, it would seem as if one outlet was indeed that “favorite amusement” of mocking a poorly written verse removed from its context.

Here, some advocacy is surely warranted. What both period critics and later scholars alike have failed to emphasize are the passages in these libretti that manage to rise above the quality of the surrounding material. These libretti all possess undeniable weaknesses in terms of style and content, more of which will be examined below, but successful sections deserve to be highlighted as well. In *Poia*, Hartley’s plot achieves a compelling climax in the second act’s transformation scene. Poia is exhausted and near death following his arduous trek to the realm of the sun god. The sun rises and the scenery changes to reveal Natosi himself, the Four Seasons and his subjects, who sing a chorus of praise. Hartley’s stage directions call for “a cavern like

¹³² “Victor Herbert’s *Natoma*,” *The Independent* 70 (1911): 659.

¹³³ H. J. Whigham, “Echoes of the Stage,” *Town and Country* (4 March 1911): 24.

hall, the walls and roof are of clouds upon which varied lights play.” Natosi is given a heroic entrance aria, imbued with all the usual Indianist textual markers:

Again the night is conquered and in fear, in fear
Her dark robed cohorts vanish from the World,
Her sable pennants fade and disappear when my majestic banners are unfurled. ...
Ours is the power to wake the world;
To give it light for labor and for daring deeds. ...
Thus we are all powerful, glorifying nature and by nature glorified!¹³⁴

The text by itself successfully conveys the grandeur of the rising sun, but it is this scene’s overall dramatic progress and scenic transformation that, if effectively staged, could provide the type of musico-theatrical experience that only opera can provide.

Indianist texts, like the one above, frequently inspire the libretto writers to do their best work. Papan’s dream narrative from *Azora* and Tomasa’s prophetic aria from *The Sacrifice*, both previously discussed, are among their respective authors’ best passages. Likewise, some of the most genuine and emotionally convincing texts occur when the librettists give an Indian heroine the opportunity to explain her way of life to a male companion. Near the beginning of *Natoma*, Redding provides a lengthy passage in which Natoma explains to Paul the significance of her abalone-shell amulet, a key element in both the character’s costuming and the symbolic workings of the opera’s plot. The never-changing poetic meter suggests that Redding is intentionally imitating Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, the classic example of Indianist narrative. Herbert excised two entire stanzas from Redding’s original when setting the text. Although the cut may improve the dramatic pacing of this scene, the missing text results in a loss of detail that weakens the plot and allows for the kinds of criticisms that critics like Krehbiel leveled at the work. Since Redding’s

¹³⁴ The transformation scene can be found in Nevin, *Poia*, 64–73; stage directions, 67; Natosi’s lyrics, 69–72. Eugenie von Huhn’s German translation reads: “Besiegt die Nacht auf’s Neu! Voll Furcht entfliehn die finstern Diener nächtlicher Gewalt. Des Himmels schwarze Schleier schwinden hin, wenn mein erhabnes Banner offen wallt. ... Durch unsre Macht erwacht die Welt, mein Licht gibt Kraft zum Wirken und zu kühner Tat. ... So durch unsre Allmacht verherrlicht die Natur, und von ihr verherrlicht wir!”

full text is not included in the score, a facsimile of this page from the published libretto appears in figure 3.1 below. The text not set by Herbert is enclosed in square brackets and indicated with an arrow. In its entirety, Redding's narrative reveals Natoma as a character of real emotional depth.

Figure 3.1. Natoma's Narrative

NATOMA

11

ing of yourself.] Tell me of your people,
tell me of Natoma, and see! (*taking the
abalone-amulet, which is hanging from the
necklace around NATOMA's neck, in his hand.*)
What is the secret of this charm you guard so
closely?

NATOMA (*crossing her hands against her
throat and shrinking from PAUL*).

Would you ask me of my people,
Of my father and his father?
Then I bid you now to listen.

From the clouds came my first father;
Out he stepped upon the mountain
Over there upon the mainland,
In the early dawn of morning,
And his people followed after.
Soon there came an awful famine,
And his people paled with hunger,
Paled with hunger and the famine.
Then he went down to the ocean
Where the waters roll unceasing,
And he prayed unto the Spirit,
To the Spirit of the mountain,
To the Spirit of the waters.
And lo, his prayer was answered.
At his feet, in untold numbers,
Tossed up by the mighty ocean,
Found he there the abalone,
Rich with meat the abalone.
With this meat he fed his people,
Brought to life his starving people,
And with prayer they thanked the Spirit.

→ [In the twilight of his lifetime,
On his couch within the wigwam,
Called the Chief his sons about him,
Spoke he to the eldest thus-wise:
"I have been upon the mountain,
With the Spirit in communion;
There the mighty Spirit gave me
As a token, with his blessing,
This fair shell of abalone,
Filled with earth from off the mountain
Sealed within the abalone.
Bade me guard it in my bosom
As a deed of gift and plenty
From the Spirit to his people.
Thou the strongest, thou the eldest

Shalt succeed to my dominion.
On thy neck I hang the token."
He then turned his back upon them
And his son became the Chieftain.

In the ages past this happened,
But the gift has come unbroken
From one Chieftain to the other,
From the father to the eldest,
From the mountain to the ocean
Has the gift come down unbroken.]

In the old age of my father
All my brothers had departed,
Lost in battle with the stranger.
Then my father called me to him,
And he said to me, "Natoma,
Thou the strongest, thou the eldest,
Shalt succeed to my dominion.
On thy neck I hang the token.
Guard the token in thy bosom
As a deed of gift and plenty
From the Spirit to his people."

PAUL. I salute thee, Natoma, Princess,
Queen and Ruler of this fair and radiant
country!

NATOMA.

Vanished are my father's people.
Now the stranger comes as chieftain.

PAUL (*pointing to hacienda*). And there
is where lives Barbara, the beautiful Barbara?
Tell me, Natoma, is she so very beautiful?

NATOMA. Barbara, my Barbara! She is
more beautiful than the fawn in springtime!
She is more lovely than the poppies on the
hillside! My Barbara! Her eyes are like the
stars in blue water. Her lips are red berries
in the dew. When you see her you must love
her. Oh, Paul! When you see her you *will*
love her!

It had to be! It had to be! Oh, Paul!
Take me, beat me, kill me, but let me be your
slave! (*Falls at PAUL's feet.*)

PAUL (*kneeling to her, and taking her
hands in his*). You little wild-flower, Na-
toma!

Page 11 from Redding's published libretto for *Natoma*, containing Natoma's narrative of the abalone-amulet, with the extra text not set by Herbert enclosed in brackets and indicated with an arrow.

In a comparable libretto highlight, Eberhart provides the character of Shanewis with an opportunity to explain her own sense of Indianness to Lionel. Whereas Natoma, in the example above, is attracted to Paul and therefore willing to reveal her personal history, Shanewis's speech comes after Lionel's deception has been revealed. Unlike the legendary tone of Natoma's text, with its echoes of Longfellow's nineteenth-century prosody, Shanewis's passage offers a strikingly modern point of view on the history of unfair treatment that Indians suffered at the hands of the Anglo settlers and the American government. This text is perhaps the most emotionally exposed passage found anywhere in these operas, a fitting component in a work consciously modeled on veristic trends:

For half a thousand years
 Your race has cheated mine
 With sweet words and noble sentiments,
 Offering friendship, knowledge, protection.
 With one hand you gave—niggardly,
 With the other took away—greedily!
 The lovely hunting grounds of my fathers
 You have made your own;
 The bison and the elk have disappeared before you,
 The giants of the forest are no more.
 Your ships infest our rivers,
 Your cities mar our hills.
 What gave you in return?
 A little learning, a little restless ambition,
 A little fire water,
 And many, many cruel lessons in treachery!

...

Into the forest, near to God I go
 To commune with my own soul
 Within the solitude
 And recover from this wound!¹³⁵

Carr's libretto for *Narcissa* likewise reserves its most compelling passages for the title heroine. In each of the opera's final two acts, Narcissa delivers a soliloquy in which she reflects

¹³⁵ Eberhart, *Shanewis*, 13.

upon the hardships she has faced as a missionary and as a frontier immigrant. Her first soliloquy opens the third act and advances the audience several years ahead of where the previous act had ended, long after the toil of a missionary life has dampened the idealism that a much younger Narcissa embodied at the beginning of the opera:

(Plaintively, wearily.) Ah, another weary day that but repeats the weary yesterdays. Knows God how hard the toil to win these children of the plains? *(Seeing eyes at window.)* Eyes! Eyes! Everywhere they are! No hour of day or night may we escape them save in darkness, sleep. And yet no fear must daunt me. That is doubting God, and hindering Marcus, too. *(She kneels, prays.)*

O God above, we thank Thee for the night's sweet rest, the dawn so fair; for safety, food, and home. Oh, prosper us in work for Thee. Bless us, nerve our hearts, our hand in Thine employ.¹³⁶

In the act-four soliloquy, which occurs immediately before the massacre scene, Narcissa receives a saint-like vision, a premonition that she will, in the end, lose her own life:

(In reverie.) O mother, dear, how lightly I took vows to come upon this mighty errand of the Lord, deserting you and all so dear. I hear as then, the song, the prayer—the bell. I see your face as on that peaceful Sabbath morn when Marcus came, his fiery message telling. *[(A bell tolls.)]*

Hark! How beats my heart! *(Bell.)* Again, again across grief-stricken years of toil that doom-impending stroke! And now as then, I know it means farewell to those I love. *(Bravely.)* And now, as then, undaunted, waits my soul upon the Lord! It is my call from Him on high. I come!¹³⁷

Each of these moments encompass an emotional depth and nuance lacking in other parts of Carr's libretto. Here she manages to rise above the limitations imposed by the impersonal, archaic tone of much of the surrounding text. These passages more than any other give Moore and Carr the opportunity to present Narcissa in a heroic light, as she admits her struggles yet

¹³⁶ Carr, *The Cost of Empire*, 16.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

finds the strength through her faith to overcome her fears. Here Moore and Carr present their own vision of the historical Narcissa Whitman—a feminine exemplar in operatic form.

The Pitfalls of Comprehensibility

Regardless of the various strengths and weaknesses of each opera's plot, and despite the highlights that occur in each work, the overall style of English used in these libretti posed a barrier to widespread acceptance. As is painfully clear from the weakest examples already encountered throughout this chapter, much of the language is a stylized, archaic, or hyper-formal variety of English, rather than a contemporary, conversational or vernacular one. With the European operas of the standard repertoire—that is, with operas sung in foreign languages—the exclusively English-speaking portion of the audience could not be intimately familiar with the quality and characteristics of the sung texts. One might read along with a translated libretto or loosely follow the story after having read a plot synopsis in one of the period's innumerable published collections of “stories from the opera.”¹³⁸ Thus if a particular bit of sung text employed an awkward grammatical construction, an archaic locution, or an absurd rhyme, no one was the wiser since it was likely happening in Italian, German, or French.¹³⁹

However, when the text was sung in English—be it a translated libretto or a newly written one—the majority of the audience would potentially be aware of any textual weaknesses. Unfortunately for any new American opera, average operagoers—and professional critics especially—were now able to evaluate the merits of a libretto in greater specificity than ever before. Glenn Dillard Gunn likewise wondered if “the singers find themselves suddenly

¹³⁸ For a discussion of what these books reveal about an emergent canon of American opera, see Appendix D.

¹³⁹ For audience members who did speak these languages—particularly immigrants from these countries—many of the repertoire operas were considered established masterpieces and thus existed beyond criticism in terms of the quality of their texts.

subjected to far more exacting standards in the matter of enunciation and diction” when they are “addressing the public in a tongue with which all are familiar.”¹⁴⁰ This heightened awareness of flaws often resulted in a prejudice against operas in English in general and American opera in particular. Cecil Forsyth, writing in 1911, offered an insightful explanation of the anti-English-language preference:

Now, the ordinary operagoer ... may not know enough about French, German, or Italian to be able to say whether they are being sung properly or not, but his knowledge of his own language teaches him that there is something radically wrong when that language is unintelligible. ... [H]is preference of Italian to English is really a preference of Italian words finely chosen and finely sung to English words ill chosen and ill sung—a preference which we all share.¹⁴¹

Frederick Converse, too, recognized that this prejudice had in fact “become deep-rooted, and not without reason, because of the miserable translations in which operas, if sung in English, are usually presented” thus convincing many listeners “that English is an awkward and unsingable language.”¹⁴² (Converse’s mention of “miserable translations” is particularly ironic in light of the unexpected influence to be described below.) Nevertheless, the very newness of these American operas made detailed criticism obligatory.¹⁴³

The style of English employed in these libretti, and why this style proved an impediment to audience and critical acceptance, can best be explored in the conversational passages of

¹⁴⁰ Glenn Dillard Gunn, “Work of Chicago Opera Company Proves Opera in English Possible,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 March 1911.

¹⁴¹ Cecil Forsyth, *Music and Nationalism: A Study of English Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 188–9. Forsyth is specifically describing the scene in Great Britain, but his comments equally pertain to the United States.

¹⁴² Converse quoted in Robert J. Garofalo, *Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871–1940): His Life and Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 37.

¹⁴³ It is necessary to acknowledge the flip side of the intelligibility coin—singers’ ability to enunciate and project a text clearly. This was of course a problem in English as in any other language. A commentator in *The Independent* complained, “Few even of the great singers enunciate distinctly, and as long as they fail to do this, what difference does it make whether they sing in English or in some other language?” Frederick Donaghey, that great enemy of *Azora*’s libretto, seemed relieved that the cast was “unused to the English language in their business, so that not much of Mr. David Stevens’ text went across the footlights.” See “Opera in English,” *The Independent* 70 (23 February 1911): 399; and Donaghey, “Mr. Hadley’s Opera,” *Chicago Tribune*, 27 December 1917.

connecting text that occur in the less compelling musical moments, for here are found the lines that would have seemed the most ridiculous to critics and audience members alike. Here are the most egregious examples of archaic locutions, inverse word order, and awkwardly poeticized grammar. Characters in these passages are often made to converse in an unnaturally heightened, affected style of stage speech. For example, this excerpt of “dialogue” between Lionel and Amy from *Shanewis* strikes a decidedly non-contemporary and un-colloquial tone, ignoring the facts that these characters are engaged and that the opera’s plot takes place in the present day:

AMY	I am curious to hear Shanewis; I’ve scarcely seen her. She only came this morning and has spent the day in quiet.
LIONEL	Where did your mother find her?
AMY	In Oklahoma, while I was abroad. She is a descendant of the great Tecumseh. (<i>Referring to a photograph of Shanewis</i>) Is she not lovely?
LIONEL	Beautiful! Beautiful! So straight, so tall, so lithe and slender! Years ago, in Arizona, I saw a face like hers, with the same proud eyes, the same white, flashing smile.
AMY	Butterfly heart! ’Tis well I have returned. ¹⁴⁴

Note the similar style characteristics in this conversation from *Natoma* between Alvarado and Castro, as Redding introduces the conflict which will drive the plot:

CASTRO	She has come.
ALVARADO	What, Barbara?
CASTRO	The Padre brought her with the convent-girls; they are all inside, and with them that young officer. Barbara has eyes for no one but him; she is entranced.
ALVARADO	You are demented!
CASTRO	It is true!
ALVARADO	Nonsense! Wait until I see her! ¹⁴⁵

This style of English is even more absurd when it comes from the mouths of Indian or other “native” characters, as the following examples from *Poia*, *Narcissa*, and *Azora* illustrate:

¹⁴⁴ Eberhart, *Shanewis*, 5–6.

¹⁴⁵ Redding, *Natoma*, 13.

NENAHU	What answer made Natoya?
POIA	With scorn she answer'd Because of this she scorn'd me.
NENAHU	Ah yes, the scar.
POIA	She bade me tell her whence it came; I know not, and I care not now. Then adding to my grief and shame She mock'd me with a careless vow.
NENAHU	What vow made she?
POIA	'Twas but an idle promise That should this scar, this scar be wash'd away She would receive me as a lover. ¹⁴⁶
o o o o o	
ELIJAH	Siskadee! Before me, Maid of Dawn!
SISKADEE	Perhaps too soon I came.
ELIJAH	Excuse for me is ever on thy tongue, O Daughter of the Dawn. Still swiftly run thy feet the mission work to do?
SISKADEE	As sun to flower after rain, so is this place to me.
ELIJAH	'Tis well. Lead thou the mission maidens here. ¹⁴⁷
o o o o o	
MONTEZUMA	Ramatzin, the beat of drums we hear! If you have news of war, declare it!
RAMATZIN	News have I, indeed, for battle is at hand. Our signal-smoke proclaims the Tarascan! The sleeping ogre wakes and grinds his weapon!
CANEK	War! War! And Totec unappeased! We mock the god that serves us. The Sacrifice!
AZORA	(<i>enters in alarm</i>) My father! What means this ferment?
MONTEZUMA	War, my child! Strife and battle! Death and Victory! ¹⁴⁸

With English of this sort, one can better appreciate the opinions of anti-Indianist critics encountered earlier in this chapter like Lawrence Gilman, whose “imagination reels at the thought of [an] Indian ... as a serious figure in opera.” Such texts strike listeners as more absurd

¹⁴⁶ Nevin, *Poia*, 39–40.

¹⁴⁷ Carr, *Cost of Empire*, 16.

¹⁴⁸ Stevens, *Azora*, 16.

than serious, for why should operatic Indians sing lines so far removed from the undeveloped frontier?

Archaic language, however, can aid in characterization if judiciously employed. Carr's libretto for *Narcissa* is a case in point. As Moore's biographers explain, the composer felt "that the libretto should concentrate on historical fact and that they would not introduce the invented romantic entanglements characteristic of most operas." Hence in the libretto, "The text was not to be rhymed: Moore called on her mother for rhythmical prose, as in the Psalms of the King James Version, a style suitable to their noble conception of the subject."¹⁴⁹ Rhymed verse finds a perfectly comfortable home in operetta-style numbers, like those in *Natoma*. In *Narcissa*, on the other hand, with its serious plot of Christian missionaries and historical events, archaic text serves to symbolically define the characters. As ordained servants of God pursuing an honorable mission, their Biblically styled text presents them as models to be emulated. The following conversation between Narcissa and Marcus, for example, is more convincing in this moralizing context than it would be in a secular situation:

NARCISSA	Marcus, welcome!
MARCUS	And farewell it must be soon.
NARCISSA	That word I cannot speak! Oh, longer stay—a week, a day!
MARCUS	Would it were right to wait. My heart says yes, my soul speaks nay.
NARCISSA	How long your stay? And when will you return?
MARCUS	I cannot tell.
NARCISSA	A year perchance, or mayhap two?
MARCUS	It may not be again.
NARCISSA	My maiden's heart shall widowed be if you come not once more. ... Royal soul! Love of my heart, think thou my head can rest on softest couch of down when mighty terrors compass thee around? Thy saddle- pillowed head the prize of some revengeful savage, or storm, or prowling brute? Oh, would that I, frail woman though I be, thy risks,

¹⁴⁹ Catherine Parsons Smith and Cynthia S. Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore, American Composer* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 70.

thy life might share; that I with thee some large and noble work for
God might do.¹⁵⁰

At least one critic of the 1925 San Francisco revival of *Narcissa* complimented the effectiveness of the libretto's style. Gem Harris noted that "While the narrative provides little basis for that passionate love making which is the main feature of most operas ... [the libretto] is so impregnated with a quality of spirituality that one experiences no sense of loss from a lack in expression of a more material passion."¹⁵¹ Yet Carr surely minimizes the effectiveness of her stylized language by applying it equally to all her characters—spiritual missionaries, "savage" Indians and rugged frontiersmen alike.

What, then, is the source of this style of English and why did this group of librettists so consistently employ it? Without a tradition of American librettos to build upon, few models were near at hand. While there was a thriving tradition of lighter comic opera and operetta in English, these could only furnish a parallel for set pieces or isolated stock numbers and could not offer a model for the continuously sung lines of an opera's text. Thus it would appear that librettists turned to the one source of English-language texts that were an established staple of the operatic stage—the translated libretto.

Table 3.2 below presents passages excerpted from four translated libretti in wide circulation at the time. The excerpts are drawn from four of the most popular and frequently performed operas of the period—*Faust*, *Aida*, *Carmen*, and *Pagliacci*. The selected translations, all anonymous, were those distributed or sold to audience members attending performances by the Boston, Manhattan, or Metropolitan opera companies during the first decades of the twentieth century. If a librettist was seeking an English-language model, he or she would likely

¹⁵⁰ Carr, *Cost of Empire*, 8–9.

¹⁵¹ Gem Harris, "Narcissa," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 83 (October 1925): 380.

have examined the most popular operas of the day and thus might have turned to these very libretti. When one compares the style of English employed in these translated libretti excerpts to the style of the new American libretti encountered throughout this chapter, it is immediately apparent that this is indeed an exact stylistic match. The left hand column of the table presents dialogue passages that can be compared to those examples discussed immediately above, while the right hand column presents love-texts that can be compared to the excerpts with which this chapter began. Note that both these translations and the newly-written texts all feature similarly unnatural grammar, formal or archaic locutions, “thee’s” and “thou’s,” and a degree of heightened emotion not generally encountered in standard conversation.

Table 3.2. Excerpts from English-Language Libretto Translations

Anonymous translated libretto for Gounod's <i>Faust</i> (Boston: Oliver Ditson Co., 1906). — Official Boston Opera Company libretto.		
VALENTINE	Let us drain the parting cup, comrades, It is time we were on the road.	(FAUST woos Marguerite)
WAGNER	What sayst thou? Why this sorrowful farewell?	
VALENTINE	Like you, I soon must quit these scenes, Leaving behind me Marguerite. Alas! My mother no longer lives, To care for and protect her.	Let me thy hand take, and clasp it, And behold but thy face once again, Illum'd by that pale light, From yonder moon that shines, O'er thy beauteous features shedding Its faint but golden ray. (pp. 27–8)
SIEBEL	More than one friend hast thou Who faithfully will thy place supply.	
VALENTINE	My thanks!	
SIEBEL	On me you may rely.	
STUDENTS	In us thou surely mayst confide. (p. 11)	
Anonymous translated libretto for Verdi's <i>Aida</i> (New York: Fred Rullman, n.d. [ca. 1900]). Official Metropolitan Opera libretto.		
AMNERIS	The cruel fate of war Not all alike embraces, And then the dauntless warrior Who leads the host may perish!	(RADAMES to Aida from their love duet.)
AIDA	What dost thou tell me?	Yes, we'll fly these walls now hated, In the desert hide our treasure.
AMNERIS	Yes, Radames by thine is slaughtered— and canst thou mourn him?	Here the land to woe seems fated, There all seems to smile with love.
AIDA	For ever my tears shall flow!	Boundless deserts naught can measure Where our bridal couch soon spreading.
AMNERIS	The gods have wrought thee vengeance. celestial favor to me was ne'er extended.	Starry skies shall luster shedding Be our canopy above.
AIDA	Tremble! Thou art discovered!	
AMNERIS	Thou lovest him ne'er deny it. (p. 15)	

Table 3.2 (cont.)

Anonymous translated libretto for Bizet’s <i>Carmen</i> (New York: Charles E. Burden, n.d. [ca. 1906]). — Official Manhattan Opera Company libretto containing an Italian-language text instead of the original French.		
MICHAELA	Here am I.	(JOSE declares his desperate need for Carmen.) Ah! Horror held me for its own, And one sad thought filled heart and brain One only hope—my sole desire— That I might see thee once again. Now but one tender glance I ask, One word of kindness from thee crave True my heart to thine is ever; Carmen, am I not thy slave? (p. 19)
JOSE	What a pleasure!	
MICHAELA	Your mother sent me hither.	
JOSE	Ah! Tell me of her—my mother far away.	
MICHAELA	Faithful messenger from her to thee, I bring a letter.	
JOSE	A letter?	
MICHAELA	And some money also; because a dragoon has not too much. And besides that—	
JOSE	Something else?	
MICHAELA	Indeed, I know not how—it is something more, and beyond gold by a good son more prized would be.	
JOSE	Tell me what this may be: come, reveal it to me.	
MICHAELA	Yes, I will tell you. What she has given, I will to the render. (p. 8)	
Anonymous translated libretto for Leoncavallo’s <i>Pagliacci</i> (New York: Fred Rullman, n.d. [ca. 1900]). Official Met Opera libretto.		
VILLAGER	Say! wilt drink with me a measure? They sell good liquor at the tavern yonder.	(SILVIO urges Nedda to run away with him.) Why wilt thou live, then, forever like this, Nedda? My fate is in thy hands. Nedda, pity my sorrow. Tonight the fair is o’er, thou wilt be gone tomorrow. Ah, what of me when thou are departed? How shall I live apart from thee and broken-hearted? ... If for thy husband no passion inspires thee, If all this roving life sickens and tires thee, If this great love of thine is not empty delight, Fly with me, fly with me, dearest, tonight! (p. 29)
CANIO	With pleasure!	
BEPPE	I say! Wait, you two! I’ll come with you!	
CANIO	Hi! Tonio, art thou coming?	
TONIO	I’ve got to clean the donkey. I’ll soon be after you.	
VILLAGER	Take care, my master. He waits till you’re departed, to go a courting Nedda! (pp. 7 & 9)	

More than simply adopting features from these translated librettos, the chosen textual style also stakes an aggressive claim for the seriousness of the high-art operatic genre. Stylized language, non-colloquial speech and hyper-formalized grammar intentionally separate these opera characters both from their counterparts in contemporary plays or novels and from the modern American public. The lyrics seem to call out: “This is OPERA”—and thus it cannot be confused with any other genre. These librettos display their old-fashioned qualities not as a mark of incompetence on the part of the text writers, but rather as a mark of continuity within and adherence to the operatic tradition.

From the viewpoint of contemporary critics, the use of this textual style caused more problems than it solved. H. J. Whigham, writing in 1911, coined a term that provides the title for this chapter: “If opera in English is ever to sound natural, it must be English that we know and use and not that strange language which is found only in the translations of foreign librettos and should rather be called operese than English.”¹⁵² Even if critics were pleased with an opera’s subject matter, they were quick to condemn the taint of foreign librettos. Arthur Farwell, in a dual-review of both *Natoma* and *The Sacrifice*, for example, observed that Redding’s text for *Natoma* “fulfills the conditions of opera in presenting scenes sufficiently remote from today, and capable of being invested with a romantic and a musical atmosphere” but complained that “its lyrics take on the absurdities of old Italian opera and the literary schoolroom.”¹⁵³ Despite these and other criticisms, “operese” is indeed the language style employed in what seems to have become the standard practice of the time, as the numerous excerpts from these six libretti illustrate.

¹⁵² Whigham, “Echoes of the Stage,” 24.

¹⁵³ Arthur Farwell, “American Opera on American Themes,” 445.

While archaic language was an inherent and unavoidable feature of nineteenth-century libretti, similar language in a modern text was simply unacceptable to a progressive sensibility. Critics wanted the standard of a contemporary libretto to be higher than that of the past, as Lawrence Gilman explained:

It is absurd to suppose that the composer of today is justified in setting a weak or foolish libretto merely because Mozart [in *Der Zauberflöte*] and Verdi [in *Il Traviatore*] were indifferent or indiscriminating enough to be willing to do so. And, moreover, it is not easy to write music which, like theirs, can make us forget the poverty or silliness of its literary and dramatic subject-matter.¹⁵⁴

Given that Gilman did not rate his contemporary American opera composers very highly, his words are just as much as an implicit criticism of their results as they are an admonishment for their future efforts. In Gilman's mind, the blame must always rest with the composer, who ultimately bears the sole responsibility for setting weak lyrics. Writing elsewhere, he again disallows the comparison with standard repertoire operas from the past: "It will do no good for the composer who permits himself to accept such things to point a triumphant finger at the preposterous librettos of certain masterworks."¹⁵⁵ For Gilman, American modernity and dramatic realism demanded a higher standard.

One key exception in which "regular" American characters do begin to approach a colloquial manner of speech is found in Converse's *The Sacrifice*. His American soldiers interact in a far more relaxed and natural fashion than do any other characters in the opera. Converse seems to be trying to characterize the soldiers as ordinary people, thus separating them from the other members of the cast—for example, the aristocratic Conchita or the ranking officer Burton—as this excerpt of typical soldierly banter illustrates:

¹⁵⁴ Gilman, *Nature in Music*, 151–2.

¹⁵⁵ Gilman, "Opera in English," 751.

TOM	But boys, did ye see the Captain?
CHORUS	Yes, sir!
2 ND SOLDIER	He's a fighter. How the rascal dropped from his big white horse, when he felt the bite of the Captain's steel!
1 ST SOLDIER	He was the king pin!
2 ND SOLDIER	When he went down the rest all tumbled.
BOTH	All tumbled and ran.
TOM	Lord! How they scampered away, jumping and rolling in heaps down the hill.
1 ST SOLDIER	And Jack, out there, hidden safe by the tree, shouting "After 'em boys! Kill 'em all," cried he.
2 ND SOLDIER	He scared 'em away.
TOM	And they're running yet.
2 ND SOLDIER	Fighting's a frolic with such a rabble: fun for boys and pretty girls.
ALL	He scared 'em away, and they're running yet. ¹⁵⁶

This passage, although relatively inconsequential in terms of the opera's overall plot, is significant for being one rare instance in which everyday, natural speech is employed.¹⁵⁷ Only in subsequent decades would the use of "standard American" English finally become the norm.¹⁵⁸

When singers successfully rendered the "operese" of their roles on stage, most critics were quick to complain, as Vincent Sheean's description of Mary Garden as Natoma makes clear:

Garden's English diction in the only opera she sang in that language was so remorselessly good that every word was distinct in every part of the house: the critics of the time thought this a misfortune. Like most operagoers, they could tolerate English only as long as it was unintelligible, as it usually is in singing.¹⁵⁹

Comprehensibility was clearly a double-edged sword. Yes, audiences might understand the sung text and thus they could be more intimately involved in the unfolding of the plot, but now they were also confronted with knowing exactly what was being sung. If those lyrics were absurd—

¹⁵⁶ Converse and Macy, *The Sacrifice*, 39.

¹⁵⁷ For a radical contrast, consider the cowboys and miners of Puccini's *La Fanciulla* who sing exclusively in Italian!

¹⁵⁸ Note that the first edition of H. L. Mencken's *The American Language*, a study of this nation's unique variety of spoken English, appeared in 1919 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf).

¹⁵⁹ Vincent Sheean, *Oscar Hammerstein I: The Life and Exploits of an Impresario* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 208.

and as we have seen, they often were—there was no escaping that which foreign-language librettos easily obscured. However, some critics rose to the defense of American librettists by confronting what they perceived to be a prejudice against native operatic products. For example, B. M. Steigman, griping that even the average libretto “consists of unrelieved twaddle,” perceptively observed that “nonsense finds something of a refuge in the foreign language: it is quite blatantly exposed only when it appears in the vernacular.”¹⁶⁰ Robert Simon, a theater critic for *The New Yorker*, similarly complained that “Duller operas than *Natoma* continue in the standard repertoire, and if the piece were sung in Italian, thus obscuring its textural [sic] peculiarities, it might still have a hearing now and then.”¹⁶¹ Towards the end of his life, Victor Herbert apparently felt the very same way: comprehensibility is the downfall of an opera, especially if the libretto is flawed. He complained that “Here in America they swallow the most idiotic plot as long as it’s in German, French, Italian or anything they can’t understand. I still say my *Natoma* is as good as Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*. My mistake was not to do it in some American Indian dialect!”¹⁶² Perhaps Edward Hipsher calls out this prejudice in the most explicit terms. Defending the plot of *Shanewis*, he notes, “many a work with incongruities even more bald we have swallowed at a single gulp, and all because the composer’s name smelled of lager or ended in ‘iski’ or ‘ini.’”¹⁶³ In the judgment of these observers, the blame clearly lies not so much with the librettists but with the audience and their double standard which arose, ironically enough, through the newfound comprehensibility of an opera’s text.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Steigman, “The Great American Opera,” 367.

¹⁶¹ Robert A. Simon, “Musical Events: On Victor Herbert,” *The New Yorker* (9 June 1934): 75.

¹⁶² Herbert in an interview conducted by Jerome Kanner, quoted in Gould, *Victor Herbert*, 418.

¹⁶³ Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers*, 107.

¹⁶⁴ Surtitles in present-day opera houses invite an additional consideration of the issue of comprehensibility. They allow for even the most obscure of operatic languages to be just as approachable as the frequently encountered

* * * * *

Having considered the plots and sung texts of these works, I remain mindful of Paul

Robinson's helpful caveat:

[A]n opera cannot be read [only] from its libretto. Put another way, a libretto is not a text as we ordinarily understand that term. Because the meaning of opera is at bottom musical—because its essential argument is posed in musical language—any interpretation of opera derived exclusively, or even primarily from the libretto is likely to result in a misreading.¹⁶⁵

Thus, throughout this chapter I have been intent on teasing out the consistent strands of plot subjects, thematic trends, and language style that bind these operas together as a group, rather than attempting a “reading” or interpretation of any given work. My aim has been to establish a clearer understanding of the overall style of libretto employed by this emergent operatic school of American composers and writers, in addition to examining the critical reactions to their textual decisions. Again, as Robinson insists, “The master question for any interpreter of opera must be not What does the text say, but How is the text realized, or at least addressed, in the music? How does it embed itself in the opera’s musical fabric?” Robinson points to the path that I shall follow next—“an operatic text really has no meaning worth talking about except as it is transformed into music”—and so we continue to the music, where these American plots, themes, and lyrics begin to take shape on the operatic stage.¹⁶⁶

Italian, German and French. Since one cannot count on comprehensible English diction (or on an audience’s ability to understand sung English), surtitles generally accompany operas performed in English as well. Joseph Horowitz has briefly considered the implications of surtitles for American opera. He finds that they can provide “an unforeseen shortcut to maturity” for uninitiated audience members, but fears that they could “doom hopes of opera in English once and for all.” One might argue that translations of operas into English are no longer necessary since surtitles can achieve the same goal of helping the audience to understand the sung text. Perhaps one could now imagine a performance of an opera like *Poia* wherein the characters sing in an authentic Indian language, rather than performing the archaic and awkward English of the original libretto. For Horowitz’s comments, see ““An Exotic Entertainment’: The Failure of American Opera?” *Opera News* 58, no. 5 (November 1993): 14.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Robinson, “A Deconstructive Postscript: Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera,” in *Reading Opera*, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 328.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 341–2.

CHAPTER 4 — Soundworld I: Musical Ingredients of American Opera

[H]ave something to say that is true ... then say it in an appropriate way, using any technical means that exist, if they serve your purpose, or create new ones. Have no blind subservience to tradition, nor to novelty; both are good and useful in their different ways. Do not seek mere novelty for its own sake, nor for the sensation it may create; but do not hesitate to forsake tradition if something beautiful and true shall come of it. ... There is room for everything in the art of music.¹

—Frederick Shepherd Converse

Although Converse here is articulating his own personal approach to composition, he might just as well have intended this statement as a creed for his colleagues too. In the previous chapter, we observed how disparate threads were drawn together to craft an American style of opera libretto. Elements from the canonical European repertoire (see Appendix A) merged with indigenous settings, subjects from the popular imagination, and New-World literary archetypes. Converse's ecumenical statement points in a similar direction, but along specifically musical lines. Just as he describes, these six composers find the "good and useful" in both "tradition" and "novelty." The resultant musical idiom once again offers a blend of elements, some inherited from European models (continuity with "tradition"), and others drawn from what were perceived to be distinctively American sources (Converse's "novelty"). While these composers develop a stylistic language rooted in their European training and study of the European repertoire, none "hesitate to forsake tradition if something beautiful and true shall come of it," just as Converse advises.

¹ Taken from a St. Louis Symphony program from 2 December 1926, in which Converse was asked to explain his "theories concerning music." Quoted in Ruth Severance, "The Life and Work of Frederick Shepherd Converse," M.A. thesis (Boston University, 1932), 117–8.

My goal here in this chapter is to discern the range of influences, models, and materials at play in the overall compositional language shared among these six operas. The two predominant tendencies—similar to those at work in the librettos—are (1) continuity with the European tradition through inherited materials and (2) the desire to incorporate distinctively New-World content. The blending of these paired tendencies ultimately results in the period’s unique idiom of operatic composition. The overview of the present chapter supplies the first stage in my efforts to describe the musical aspects of this period’s emergent operatic style. The following chapter will pursue a more in depth line of analysis by comparing complementary or analogous excerpts from the selected scores in order to illustrate a musical style that I believe is ultimately representative of America’s first school of National Opera.

Inheriting the European Tradition

For many an American composer or musician at the beginning of the twentieth century, Wagner was perhaps the most daunting and inspiring individual in the entire musical pantheon. His music was among the most performed on both the operatic stage and in the nation’s concert halls. His ubiquity in all topics of musical discourse was unavoidable.² As we have already seen in previous chapters, many observers believed that Wagner’s works, as he himself had hoped, offered models that could not be ignored. As composers at the time perceived, his most valuable contributions included the technique of leading motives, a texture driven by the orchestra rather than the voices, an emotive extended-chromaticism, and a model for achieving continuous structure. American composers were uniquely positioned to capitalize on the Wagnerian

² For a case study of the persistence of the Wagnerian shadow across all musical topics, both pertaining to opera and not, from within one single, serialized publication, see Aaron Ziegel, “Opening ‘the Door to This Intense and Passionate Musical Life’: A Survey of *The Music of the Modern World*, 1895–1897” (M.M. thesis: University of Cincinnati, 2004), 16–27.

inheritance. In this country, many musicians, including numerous German immigrants and Americans who sought training in Germany, held Wagner in esteem and admiration. Seen as a great individualist, he inspired those wishing to forge their own path into operatic terrain. Wagner could thus be made to represent a quintessentially American success story—a self-made innovator and an example to be emulated.³

In Europe, however, the cult of Bayreuth was a more stifling presence. The conductor Anton Seidl, Wagner's own protégé, recognized exactly that, as he explained to American readers in 1894:

There is every reason why [American composers] should rejoice that thus far they have not been enslaved by Wagner's influence, as their brother-workers in Germany have been. And from Germany they should receive their warning. The field of grand opera is open to them; it offers them the best opportunities for achievement. It is only in this field that they can work out their greatest conceptions. Wagner must be their pattern, for, as I have already said, he represents the complete development of grand opera; but as the German composers have shown, they must use his methods without abusing them.⁴

The idea of “use without abuse” suggests that composers should draw upon Wagner's techniques selectively, making them one part of their own compositional arsenal. He warned that the “slavish imitation of Wagner's methods cannot lead to good results. ... [I]t can be nothing but folly for [a composer] to aim at results that are utterly beyond his powers, simply because one far more gifted has achieved them.” Even here, Seidl fails to escape a not-so-subtle hint of hero worship, but his suggestion points in the exact direction to which many American opera

³ Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), provides the definitive study of how this state of affairs came about in the United States. Also see Anne Dzamba Sessa, “At Wagner's Shrine: British and American Wagnerians,” in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David C. Large and William Webber (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 246–77; and Burton W. Peretti, “Democratic Leitmotifs in the American Reception of Wagner,” *19th-Century Music* 13 (1989): 28–38.

⁴ Anton Seidl, “Wagner's Influence on Present-Day Composers,” *North American Review* 158, no. 446 (January 1894): 91.

composers would turn: “Let [them], by all means, take advantage of the system of Wagner, and follow that.”⁵

Pre-performance press coverage presented both *Natoma* and *The Sacrifice* to the public as if they were indeed part of this “system.” Musical examples illustrating each work’s principal leitmotifs appeared in newspaper reports on *Natoma* and in Olin Downes lengthy, analytical synopsis of *The Sacrifice* which accompanied the published libretto.⁶ These writers expected that notated excerpts would be of use to the general, educated reader, although one can hardly imagine finding musical examples in today’s *New York Times*.⁷ Yet Herbert’s attitude towards the use and analysis of leitmotifs remained ambivalent, as the *Chicago Tribune*’s critic Glenn Dillard Gunn explained:

Opera, according to Mr. Herbert, is the form of music least benefitted by a system of leading motives because it demands first of all that flexibility whereby the greatest contrasts of the action and the smallest details of passing interest can find instant musical symbolism. Therefore it was with reluctance that he consented to transcribe for the readers of *The Tribune* the four most important musical ideas of *Natoma*. . . . One gained the impression, however, that the composer had sought to concern himself with the fundamental emotional values of the story of *Natoma* rather than with a detailed mirroring of the action.⁸

⁵ Ibid., 89–90. Note that even among Wagner’s European followers, only Engelbert Humperdinck has secured lasting success. Siegfried Wagner’s numerous operas never entered the repertoire—much like the American works considered here—although most have been recorded. Like Seidl suggested, a selective assumption of the Wagnerian legacy seems to have been most effective, as both Debussy and Richard Strauss demonstrate.

⁶ Richard Aldrich, “News of the Music World,” *New York Times*, 26 February 1911, gives five leitmotifs from *Natoma*; Glenn Dillard Gunn, “*Natoma*’s Initial Chicago Production Scheduled Event of Opera Week,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 10 December 1911, gives four leitmotifs, all of which appear in Aldrich’s analysis too. Also see figure 2.2 in chapter two.

Olin Downes, “Synopsis,” in Frederick S. Converse and John Macy, *The Sacrifice: An Opera in Three Acts* (New York: H.W. Gray Company, 1911), 6–11, includes seven music examples; Severance, “Frederick Shepherd Converse,” 52–6, also includes a discussion of Converse’s use of leitmotifs.

⁷ Note that their online versions of music stories do, however, regularly included audio excerpts. Anyone can click and listen—this does not require music literacy.

⁸ Gunn, “*Natoma*’s Initial Chicago Production,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 10 December 1911. Note that leitmotivic analyses do not originate with Wagner himself. For information on early published guides to Wagner’s leitmotifs, see Christian Thorau, “Guides for Wagnerites: Leitmotifs and Wagnerian Listening,” in *Richard Wagner and His World*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 133–50.

Apparently, Herbert wanted to avoid the extra layer of musical symbolism that the use of leitmotifs might introduce into a score. Instead, his themes act more as recurring motives—enough to announce the presence of a particular character or to tie the soundworld of his score together.

Herbert's ambivalence is indicative of the changing attitudes towards Wagner's legacy as the first quarter of the twentieth century progressed. In 1906, Henry Finck could still describe Wagner as "the guiding star for the American composer." Much like Seidl's advice, Finck too encouraged composers to imitate his approach to opera writing but warned them against imitating his musical style: "Let [a composer], like Wagner, study and copy Italian, French, German or other models; and finally let him, like Wagner, add to the treasures of our music the products of his *individual* genius."⁹ It is essential to recognize Finck's original emphasis on "individual" genius in this passage. While Wagner's methods might point composers in the correct direction, borrowing his personal idiom would diminish the chances that composers might ultimately arrive at a potent and distinctive American style. But by the end of the century's first decade, the formerly pro-Wagner tone was already beginning to sour. Lawrence Gilman seemed relieved to report, in a 1909 book, that Wagner "is an influence that is, of course, waning; and to the definite good of creative art, for it has been in a large degree pernicious and oppressive in its effect." Rather than being a positive model for American composers, Gilman's Wagner instead possessed "a sinister and paralyzing magic" that limited the creative inspiration of his successors.¹⁰

⁹ Henry T. Finck, "What is American Music?" *The Etude* 24 (1906): 357.

¹⁰ Lawrence Gilman, *Aspects of Modern Opera: Estimates and Inquires* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 6.

Dealing with the Wagnerian inheritance became one of the most challenging musical hurdles for composers during the 1910s. The Wagnerian toolbox, as one might call it, had become such an integral part of the standard operatic compositional language that American composers, like their European contemporaries, could not help but draw from it. Elise Kirk succinctly calls it “no longer a trend but a tradition” that was in place already by 1900.¹¹ Significantly, participating in “tradition” is a principal goal of these six American composers. As we have seen throughout this study, they were intent to prove that they too had operatic ideas to contribute. While they were striving for distinctiveness in terms of musical style, they nevertheless still sought continuity with an inherited, canonical European heritage. With Wagner occupying a central position within the operatic scene in this country, American composers would naturally engage with that aspect of the tradition.¹² Again, Converse’s words from the opening of this chapter ring true.

However, some writers were easily disappointed if the musical style of a new opera too closely resembled something they had heard before, especially if that something were Wagner. The German critics at the stage premiere of *Poia*, for example, detected “unformed reminiscences of Wagner” while one of *Natoma*’s reviewers recognized Herbert’s use of leitmotifs and complained that “it would be difficult to imagine an opera written at the present day without some sort of use of such themes.”¹³ Wagner is of course not the only musical

¹¹ Elise K. Kirk, *American Opera* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 139.

¹² The centrality of Wagner is especially evident in the Met’s repertoire. Of the 22 most performed operas from the years 1890–1918, seven are by Wagner (see Appendix A).

¹³ “America’s First Musical Assault upon Berlin,” *Current Literature* 48, no. 6 (June 1910): 659; and “*Natoma* Greeted by Great Audience,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1911. Harold Briggs offered this description of how a first auditor might have perceived the musical style of *Poia*: “A latecomer in the mezzanine, however, unaware of the work being performed and hearing only the music without listening closely to the words, might guess by the orchestration, continuous soaring vocal line and dramatic intensity that the opera is a new work by a German composer.” See Harold Briggs, “Indians!: A Whole Movement of Native Opera Romanticized the American Savage,” *Opera News* 40, no. 23 (1976): 23.

influence shaping the style of these operas. Any of the works established in the performance canon might yield suggestions for composers. Yet, critics and performers consistently struggled to arrive at a consensus regarding the stylistic sources of a particular work. Nor was there much agreement over whether or not these sources were a positive influence.

Natoma is a case in point. While Herbert and Redding were at work on the opera, the librettist, although contradicting the composer himself, felt it necessary to explain that Herbert “is not writing in the ultra-modern school; that is to say, he is not following in the steps of Debussy and Richard Strauss.” Instead, Redding hinted that Bizet and Verdi were more worthy models, because, in his opinion, “these two last composers ... will live after Strauss and Debussy have been forgotten.”¹⁴ Mary Garden, who originated the title role, pointed out that the opera “is not exactly what may be regarded as a ‘grand opera.’ It is not music like *Tristan* for instance. It is more like the lighter *operas-comique* which are which are heard in Paris.”¹⁵ H. J. Whigham agreed, explaining that “Herbert deliberately rejects the symphonic [i.e., Wagnerian] method. ... [T]here is no attempt to make the work one symphonic whole from beginning to end.” Contrary to some critics, however, Whigham criticized *Natoma* because “we do undoubtedly feel the lack of coherence and cumulative dramatic force when the [Wagnerian] method is dropped.”¹⁶ Arthur Farwell, like Garden, recognized an “undeniable flavor of light opera” in the work. But unlike both her and Whigham, Farwell detected more significant Wagnerian traits (“an orchestral accompaniment in which liberal use of ‘leading motives’ is made”), combined with another

¹⁴ Redding in a letter to his daughter, 5 November 1909, quoted in Edward N. Waters, *Victor Herbert: A Life in Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 374. Note that Redding’s point of view is thoroughly contradicted by both critics reviewing the work in performance and by statements from the composer himself—discussed in the “Orchestration” section below. Except for Redding, other commentators found *Natoma* to be well in line with the most up-to-date, modern tendencies, even if Redding’s description is in fact more representative of the resultant musical style.

¹⁵ Mary Garden in an interview with *Musical America*, 11 February 1911, quoted in *ibid.*, 377.

¹⁶ H. J. Whigham, “Echoes of the Stage,” *Town and Country* (4 March 1911): 24.

influence not yet mentioned—Puccini (“the freely treated aria and free musical declamation style of the type established by Puccini”).¹⁷ Aware of this varied blend of coexisting stylistic influences, Mitzi Kolisch commented that “Herbert flung into his effort all the best traditions of arias, choruses, and incidental dances.” However, she seemed unconvinced by his mixing of models and complained that his “wanderings in grand opera were as uncertain as the maneuverings of a deft canoeist on unknown and troublesome seas.”¹⁸ George Upton simply gave dodged the issue and explained to readers of his guide to *The Standard Operas* that *Natoma* was “Victor Herbertish in its music.”¹⁹ Thus, we keep circling back to a seemingly inescapable critical equivocation on the issue of whether borrowed stylistic influences aided or hindered the process of establishing an American style for opera.²⁰ (My analysis in the following chapter aims to clarify some of the imprecision advanced in these critical perceptions.)

In subsequent decades, as the Gilded Age became more of a memory, the critical tide turned strongly against American artistic products that were seen as too dependent upon “borrowed stylistic influences.” While in 1925 Eugene Simpson was still encouraging composers to draw upon the European traditions—“plucking the best from every garden”—by 1941 Cecil Smith, mentioning *Natoma* and *Azora* by name but encompassing this entire period, complained, “All are imitations, more or less pale, of a foreign idiom—of Wagner or French opera or Italian

¹⁷ Arthur Farwell, “American Opera on American Themes: Artistic Significance of Herbert’s *Natoma* and Converse’s *Sacrifice*,” *The American Review of Reviews* 43 (1911): 444.

¹⁸ Mitzi Kolisch, “Why Not an American Opera?” *The Independent* 115 (15 August 1925): 189.

¹⁹ George P. Upton, *The Standard Operas: Their Plots and Their Music*, rev. ed. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1914), 122. For a succinct comparison of the style the “Herbertish” *Natoma* with his very un-“Herbertish” second opera, *Madeleine*, see Edward Hagelin Pearson, “Victor Herbert’s *Madeleine*,” *The Opera Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1997): 61.

²⁰ Grenville Vernon’s review of the New York premiere of Hadley’s *Azora* offers a related point of view. Vernon explains that Hadley, in terms of compositional style “has been eminently sane and safe, a believer in melody, balance, in tradition. As neither melody, balance nor tradition is a peculiarly American product, it is to be expected that his music should possess a European flavor.” See Grenville Vernon, “The Chicago Opera Association Presents *Azora*, a New Work By Americans,” *New York Tribune*, 28 January 1918.

opera.”²¹ Daniel Gregory Mason, similarly, offered a sarcastic characterization, claiming that “we succeeded chiefly ... in speaking Wagner almost without an accent.”²² Already by mid-century, commentators had lost track of their predecessors’ original goals.

The composers themselves hoped that stylistic references would help their new works fit comfortably alongside the established canonical operas. Such borrowings served two critical functions. First, they helped composers learn how to write effective operas. The need to “fit in” with tradition naturally precluded the kind of compositional adventurousness that their more celebrated European counterparts pursued contemporaneously. Thus, these American works generally present a more conservative musical language than what later commentators, apparently, would have preferred. Second, and perhaps more significantly, a tradition-extending rather than tradition-breaking stylistic language helped audiences to approach the essentially unfamiliar phenomenon of American opera with a certain degree of built-in pre-acquaintance. A musical style closely related to what audiences were accustomed to hearing would strengthen a new work’s approachability. However, this does not preclude eclecticism. As critics recognized, the stylistic models ranged widely. In this, the operas themselves reflect the makeup of their first audiences. As discussed in earlier chapters, opera performances brought together recent immigrants from throughout Europe, who generally patronized the works from their homeland, alongside more established Anglo-American citizens. Thus, an eclectic blend of stylistic models would enable a new work to appeal to a more diverse swath of the audience.

²¹ Eugene E. Simpson, “America’s Position in Music,” in *The International Library of Music: Music Literature Vol. II* (New York: The University Society, 1925), 476; and Cecil Smith, “*Cabin in the Sky* Lauded for Its Musical Appeal,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 May 1941. Although a commentary on the Vernon Duke musical, Smith’s topic shifts to American opera halfway through the article.

²² Daniel Gregory Mason, *Tune In, America: A Study of Our Coming Musical Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), 4.

Unfortunately, the impression that these works are but mere derivatives of European models, an opinion established by the more recent critics cited above, has become the inherited understanding of these operas to this day. Edith Boroff, for example, articulates one such view. Writing of American operas at the Met—but her point can extend to all six operas examined in this study—she complains that their “productions [were] so basically European that they cast a pall over the whole perception of American opera.” For Boroff, these composers failed because their works were little more than an “imitation of European models, [which] has forced these operas into the European tradition rather than the American, and has not served the cause of American individuality or encouraged the development of a national consciousness.”²³ The flaw in her logic lies in her failure to consider the aims of the composers and the expectations of the original audience. Here, she faults American composers for having, in fact, achieved what they set out to do. By composing operas that demonstrated continuity with common practice at the time, and thus composing operas that had a chance to be staged and accepted, these composers were not being “forced into the European tradition,” as Boroff claims, but rather they were proving that Americans, too, could participate in this shared, inherited tradition.

This critical fixation on borrowing and derivativeness has led recent commentators to focus on describing what an opera resembles rather than how an opera actually sounds. Instead of attempting to characterize an opera’s musical style through direct assessment of specific musical examples, many writers have been content to define style through reference alone. Robert Garofalo, for instance, provides a laundry list of Frederick Converse’s style traits, including “harmonic and orchestral devices of impressionism,” “mastery of late nineteenth-

²³ Edith Boroff, “American Opera: An Early Suggestion of Context,” in John L. DiGaetani and Josef P. Sirefman, eds., *Opera and the Golden West: The Past, Present, and Future of Opera in the U.S.A.* (Cranbury, N. J.: Associated University Presses, 1994), 23.

century ultra-chromatic harmony,” “the leitmotif technique,” and finally something “not dissimilar to the mature musical style of Richard Wagner.”²⁴ Harry Perison finds Dvořák, Saint-Saens, Wolf-Ferrari and Richard Strauss to be the key influences in Cadman’s style, basing the list on “those most often mentioned in his letters to Eberhart.” To Andrew Porter’s ear, *Shanewis* sounds “tunefully Puccinian, with an occasional hint of Griegian exoticism.”²⁵ Moiya Callahan compares Moore’s *Narcissa* to Verdi and other Italian operas, while Nicholas Tawa, describing *Azora*, detects “a Straussian influence” and the language of “contemporary Italian operatic styles.”²⁶ Although all these descriptions come from staunch advocates for their respective subject’s music, they continue to promulgate the inherited opinion that the music is more derivative of models than it is distinctively original.

Unintentionally, such commentary encourages the misperception that historiography can safely dismiss the output of this entire generation of composers and instead concentrate on locating the birth of “true” American music later in the century. Nicholas Tawa, despite his comments above, notes the need to recognize the creators’ original stylistic intentions:

Their primary objective was to write music that mattered to them and their public because of its persuasive power and perceptible significance. There was no sense that the established methods of composition had been exhausted. ... They felt that they could speak contemporaneously and vitally using the techniques bequeathed them by those acknowledged to be master composers. When they composed, it was as if they were dynamically reliving the history of the last hundred years of music for the first time. They

²⁴ He sums Converse up as “a moderately progressive romantic”—whatever that means. See Robert J. Garofalo, *Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871–1940): His Life and Music* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 121, 123, 132, 143, and 159.

²⁵ Harry D. Perison, “Charles Wakefield Cadman: His Life and Works” (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1978), 422; and Andrew Porter, “Musical Events: Singtime in the Rockies,” *The New Yorker* (27 August 1979): 83.

²⁶ Moiya Callahan, “Mary Carr Moore’s *Narcissa*” (M.M. thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1999), 38; and Nicholas Tawa, *Mainstream Music of Early Twentieth Century America: The Composers, Their Times, and Their Works* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 84.

were convinced that if they could but write honestly and unaffectedly, what was original in their music would show through.²⁷

As Tawa implies, it is necessary to move beyond the mere detection of influences and instead accept their works “honestly and unaffectedly.” In the previous chapters, I have sought out an understanding of what these composers were attempting to accomplish and have tried to recover the expectations of the original audiences and critics. Here and in the following chapter, my examination of the published scores aims to enable “what was original in their music” to indeed “show through.”

Americanness through Indian Music

While composers were keen to demonstrate that their operas were in continuity with the European tradition, they too sought to inject a quintessentially American flavor into their works. Following the lead of Dvořák and others, as chapter one described, this group of composers chose Indian musical materials as the principal means to achieve this goal, ranging from quotations of borrowed Indian melodies to passages that are imitative or suggestive of stereotyped Indian musical traits. Research into the uses of such material in works by classically trained composers is a thoroughly developed and often controversial scholarly field. Approaches cover a broad spectrum, including issues of ethnography, exoticism, Americanism, and nationalism, in addition to more standard reception history and musical analyses of individual works.²⁸ Tara Browner, a musicologist of American Indian descent, approaches the topic from a

²⁷ Nicholas Tawa, *The Coming of Age of American Art Music: New England's Classical Romanticists* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 64–5.

²⁸ The most comprehensive scholarship on the uses of Indian topics and musical materials comes from Michael V. Pisani. See his dissertation, “Exotic Sounds in the Native Land: Portrayals of North American Indians in Western Music” (Ph.D. diss., Eastman School of Music, 1996), and his subsequent book, *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005). For his discussion of the musical traits through which composers evoke an Indian atmosphere, see “‘I’m an Indian Too’: Creating Native American Identities in Nineteenth- and

more critical angle, actively challenging and confronting the ways in which composers have appropriated Indian musical materials from a post-modern point of view.²⁹ In light of her work, it is worthwhile to reexamine the period's debate over why a composer should or should not make use of Indian materials, particularly in reference to opera composition. The issue of a composer's right to appropriation—Browner's primary critique—is notably absent from the primary sources themselves. Here, I seek to demonstrate the emergence of a point of view that considered borrowed Indian melodies to be an acceptably national ingredient, and thus one that could play an integral role in defining a distinctively American operatic compositional language.

Just as Indian plot topics seemed like an obvious choice when selecting indigenous subject matter, similarly nationalistic arguments supported the inclusion of Indian music. On the most basic level, such ingredients supplied a uniquely New World exoticism, something always welcome in the opera house. However, at the heart of the debate, nationalism trumps exoticism as the motivating factor. For these composers, perhaps the most immediately compelling impetus

Early Twentieth-Century Music," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 218–57. For a comprehensive study of exoticism in music, see Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Additional broadly defined studies come from Harold E. Briggs, "The North American Indian as Depicted in Musical Compositions, Culminating with American 'Indianist' Operas of the Early Twentieth Century: 1900–1930" (M.M. thesis, Indiana University, 1976); Emmanuel Gorge, *L'Imaginaire Musical Amérindien: Structures et Typologies* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 161–95; Deborah Margaret Osman, "The American 'Indianist' Composers: A Critical Review of Their Sources, Their Aims, and Their Compositional Procedures" (D.M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1992); and Regine Wild, *Lieder der nordamerikanischen Indianer als kompositorische Vorlagen in der Zeit von 1890 bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, Berliner Musik Studien 11 (Köln: Studio, 1996).

For related studies on individual composers or works, see for example Adrienne Fried Block, "Amy Beach's Music on Native American Themes," *American Music* 8 (1990): 141–66; Francis Brancalone, "Edward MacDowell and Indian Motives," *American Music* 7 (1989): 359–81; Kara Anne Gardner, "Edward MacDowell, Antimodernism, and 'Playing Indian' in the *Indian Suite*," *Musical Quarterly* 87 (2004): 370–422; Beth Ellen Levy, "'In the Glory of the Sunset': Arthur Farwell, Charles Wakefield Cadman, and Indianism in American Music," *repercussions* 5 (March 1996): 128–83; Frederik E. Schuetze, "The Idealization of American Indian Music as Exemplified in Two Indianist Song Cycles of Charles Wakefield Cadman: An Historic and Stylistic Analysis to Aid in Their Performance" (D.M.A. diss., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1984); and Denise Von Glahn, "Charles Ives, Cowboys, and Indians: Aspects of the 'Other Side of Pioneering,'" *American Music* 19 (2001): 291–314.

²⁹ See her dissertation, "Transposing Cultures: The Appropriation of Native North American Musics, 1890–1990" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995); and her article, "'Breathing the Indian Spirit': Thoughts on Musical Borrowing and the 'Indianist' Movement in American Music," *American Music* 15 (Fall 1997): 265–84.

arose out of the activity of their ethnographer contemporaries, who were busily collecting, transcribing, and publishing the musics of the Indian peoples. There was a sense of urgency about this work, driven primarily by the idea of the “Vanishing Indian” and concern for the potential loss of cultural heritage. American baritone David Bispham, writing in 1902, expressed a commonly held point of view when he remarked that the nation possessed “nothing ... indigenous to the soil save a few Indian chants, war-songs and lullabies, which are at last being transcribed and *rescued from total extinction*” (emphasis added).³⁰ Rescue and recovery were only part of the motivation for the period’s ethnographers. Since the 1890s, researchers like Theodore Baker, John C. Fillmore, Alice Fletcher, Francis La Flesche, and Elijah M. Haines had been publishing notated Indian melodies.³¹ Yet a younger generation of ethnographers seemed to understand that their work served but little purpose if all it accomplished was to salvage the Indian melodies from “extinction.” Instead, their comments reveal that from the outset of their research, some writers kept the needs of the American composer firmly in mind.

Wishing to contribute in their own way toward the establishment of a national music, some ethnographers believed that by making Indian musical materials accessible, they might provide the inspirational impetus that composers in the United States were apparently lacking. In her preface to *The Indians’ Book* (1907), Natalie Curtis explained, if only “recognition of [Indian song] awakened among our own people, America may one day contribute a unique music to the world of art.” She believed that “the folk music of any land is a soil from which genius draws sustenance for fresh growth, and the stimulus to the creative mind thorough contact with this

³⁰ David Bispham, “Music as a Factor in National Life,” *North American Review* 175, no. 553 (December 1902): 788.

³¹ A selective listing of sources of notated Indian music available to composers during the 1910s appears as Part VI of the bibliography. For further discussion of these materials, see Pisani, “Exotic Sounds in the Native Land,” 51–5 and 62–6.

native art should give to America a new and vigorous art impulse.” Indeed, this was an especially pertinent “stimulus,” in her opinion. She recognized that “the undeveloped talents native to the aboriginal American”—that is, their perceived ability to invent songs and melodies—“are precisely those in which the Anglo-Saxon American is deficient.” Curtis anxiously mused, “Can we afford to lose from our country any sincere and spontaneous art impulse, however crude?”³²

Curtis was not alone in hoping that this research might inspire composers and provide the kernel of a national idiom. Frederick Burton, writing in 1909, encouraged the exploration of Indian music by appealing to his readers’ sense of national pride:

It might be adopted from a sane desire to see for one’s self what worth there may be in music sprung from our soil, and it certainly should be inspired by patriotic eagerness that our country should prove to be not behind others in melodic resources, but as richly endowed as any land that ever had boundaries.³³

Naturally, the task fell to the American composer to “prove” that the nation was in fact “not behind”—and of course, Indian melodies would be the vehicle through which the nation could prove itself, just as Dvořák had suggested. Frances Densmore stated this explicitly in a 1915 list of “four reasons [which] justify the intensive study of Indian music,” the second being “that our composers may have native themes for use in distinctly American compositions.”³⁴

Partisans of this approach were drawn to Indian musical materials because they opened the door into an imagined, idealized past and offered a reflection of the frontier spirit, a still-

³² Natalie Curtis, *The Indians’ Book: An Offering by the American Indians of Indian Lore, Musical and Narrative, to Form a Record of the Songs and Legends of Their Race* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1907), xxviii and xxx.

³³ Frederick R. Burton, *American Primitive Music* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1909), 193.

³⁴ Frances Densmore, “The Study of Indian Music,” *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1915): 197. Nicolas Slonimsky jokingly referred to this “division of labor,” in which “the Indian West ... furnish[es] the necessary folk-song element for the cultured East,” as “a typical precedent to the formation of every great national idiom.” See “Composers of New England,” *Modern Music* 7, no. 2 (February-March 1930): 24.

potent national symbol.³⁵ This association is particularly ironic when one considers the generally disdainful views that much of the public held towards this group. However, music was seen as one element that could help to bridge the ethnic gap. John Fillmore argued as early as 1894 “that those whom we are accustomed to despise as an inferior and barbarous race reveal, in the glimpse this music affords into their inner life, a noble religious feeling [that is] expressed in music some of which is worthy of comparison with the best we ourselves possess.”³⁶ The trope of “religious feeling” resonates powerfully in all six of the operas examined here. This is of course the motivating force of Poia’s quest, while Natoma, Shanewis, Papantzin (in *Azora*), Tomasa (in *The Sacrifice*), and Elijah and Siskadee (in *Narcissa*) each express an understanding of their personal conflicts in religious terms. (The use of religious or sacred music is discussed in the following chapter.)

From the composer’s point of view, Cadman’s words seem to supply a justification for the whole group. He explains that the purpose of incorporating Indian melodies into classical composition is “to express, in terms of tone, the spirit of the land in which [we] live.”³⁷ Indeed, while a later generation of composers including Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Leo Sowerby, and Elie Siegmeister is more strongly associated with creating a musical sound definitive of the western frontier landscape, this territory was just as powerful of a compositional inspiration earlier in the century. Yet unlike their successors, turn-of-the-century composers found “the spirit of the Indian” to be inextricably bound up with “the spirit of the West.” Cadman described the emotional depth of this connection:

³⁵ In Richard Crawford similar construction, “the music of American Indians pointed toward a heroic past, an unspoiled continental landscape, and an American people of admirable, independent spirit.” See *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 384.

³⁶ John C. Fillmore, “A Study of Indian Music,” *Century Magazine* 47 (February 1894): 623.

³⁷ Charles Wakefield Cadman, “The ‘Idealization’ of Indian Music,” *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1915): 387.

If the old life and unconquerable spirit of the red man were not wrapped up in the history of this continent, how strange that would be! One cannot live in the Great West without sensing it and thinking how it would “sound” in terms of rhythm and melody. The composer feels the very pulse of it in his contact with the awesome canyons, the majestic snow-capped ranges and the voiceless yet beautiful solitudes of the desert. And if the composer from his dream-height seems to feel these things calling to him, calling in plaintive cadences, in dynamic syncopation that strongly and strangely symbolizes the restless energy of his great land, he may be forgiven.³⁸

Thus, the decision to situate these opera plots (excepting *Azora*) in the West was not just dramaturgical, but musically motivated too.

Not everyone, of course, was as convinced as Cadman. Critics of the use of Indian musical materials were, if anything, even more vocal than the proponents were. The race issue continued to incite the most aggressive critique, just as it had since Dvořák first steered composers in the direction of Indian and African-American musics. Given that American composers were drawing freely upon the European operatic tradition, H. J. Whigham rightly pointed out that “Indian folk songs ... are in no sense the heritage of American composers. ... We have a far greater right to the heritage of German song than we have to any Indian melodies.” His opinion, typical for the period, however, is colored by the need to stress the ethnic separation between persons of European ancestry and the nation’s First Peoples: “the Indians have nothing in common with the people we call Americans. The Indians are an alien race and neither their language nor their music is ours.”³⁹ Likewise, an unsigned New York Times review of *Natoma* pursued similar logic:

Indian tunes do not fall upon the ears of Americans as anything familiar or in any way belonging to themselves, as do the folk tunes of England, France, Germany, Italy,

³⁸ Ibid., 388. Cadman’s earliest contact with Indian music was obviously one of the key formative experiences of his life. At the urging of ethnologist Alice Fletcher, Cadman traveled in the summer of 1909 to the Omaha reservation in Nebraska where he made phonograph recordings of their music and first learned to play the traditional instruments that he would later demonstrate in his popular Indian Music Talks. See Robert W. Baisley, “Charles Wakefield Cadman: Completely American,” *Music Educators Journal* 61, no. 9 (1975): 57.

³⁹ These comments come in the context of a review of *Natoma*; Whigham, “Echoes of the Stage,” 24.

Bohemia, Poland, Russia or Norway to the natives of those countries, even those most sophisticated in modern musical art. Indian tunes are to us exotic, the strange utterance of an alien race, and form no sort of substratum for our musical feelings. They are for the most part hard and uncouth in outline, difficult and intractable material.⁴⁰

Note that the final two sentences of this critique include no fewer than seven negative or derogatory descriptors. Both remarks are representative of what was a widely held point of view during the period.

Even some proponents of the study of Indian music were opposed to its incorporation within the context of art music. Oscar Sonneck, for one, admitted that the material “interests and impresses me deeply” but maintained that the “folk-songs of the Indians are American folk-songs only in a geographical sense.”⁴¹ Likewise, music critic Richard Aldrich recognized that “Indian music is necessarily of more interest to the ethnologist ... than of value to the composer” because the “material is stiff and intractable to the musician.”⁴² Others, like Henry Finck and Daniel Gregory Mason respectively, made allowances for the use of Indian materials “only as occasional spices” or “now and then for an artistic holiday.”⁴³ These suggestions ultimately point in the direction of the method employed in the operas considered here. Even in those works that rely heavily or exclusively on the use of Indian characters, borrowed Indian musical materials make up only one facet of each score’s soundworld.⁴⁴ Within this eclectic context, an

⁴⁰ “Natoma Greeted by Great Audience,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1911.

⁴¹ Oscar G. Sonneck, “A Survey of Music in America,” in *Suum Cuique: Essays in Music* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1916), 141.

⁴² Richard Aldrich, “Indian and Negro Music: The President’s Suggestion as to Their Value for American Composers,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1906.

⁴³ Henry T. Finck, “What is American Music?” *The Etude* 24 (1906): 356; and Daniel Gregory Mason, *Contemporary Composers* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 251.

⁴⁴ Other works from the same period, although ones that did not participate within the context of traditional grand opera like those considered here, did attempt to employ a basis of Indian musical materials more exclusively. For two examples, see the published vocal score, Charles Sanford Skilton, *The Sun Bride: A Pueblo Indian Opera*, libretto by Lillian White Spencer, edited by Thomas Warburton, *Recent Researches in American Music* 33

appropriated Indian melody, when inserted into a traditionally Romantic operatic language, does not necessarily remain recognizably Indian. Harmonization, orchestration, and operatic vocal production all, to varying degrees, obscure the origin.

The method for incorporating such material into classical composition eventually became known as “idealization,” a term coined by Cadman, although the ethnologist Frederick Burton had already laid out strikingly similar principles in his book *American Primitive Music* in 1909. Burton recognized that “we whites cannot grasp the whole beauty of a melody unless we hear it with appropriate harmony. Therefore, if the beauty of Indian song is to be set forth to civilization, harmony must be employed.” He proceeded to instruct composers as to how they should handle an Indian melody in their works:

[A composer] is not concerned with what the original composer of the theme would have done in the way of developing it; he is not restricted in his extension of the material by the thought that the Indian would not have done thus or so.... He is concerned solely with the making of good music.... In other words, having selected his thematic material, it is his right, if not his duty, to forget its origin and proceed according to the purely musical demands of the subject, guided only by his own highly developed sensibilities, and regardless of the circumstances ... that attended the material in its primitive state.⁴⁵

Cadman, in a lengthy *Musical Quarterly* article from 1915, offered his own suggestions that would seem to expand upon Burton’s thesis by deepening the personal connection to Indian culture required of the composer:

One should, if possible, be in touch with the Indian’s legends, his stories and the odd characteristics of his music, primitive though they be, and one should have an insight into the Indian’s emotional life concomitant with his naive and charming art-creations. And while not absolutely necessary, a hearing of his songs on the Reservation amidst native surroundings adds something of value to a composer’s efforts at idealizing.⁴⁶

(Madison, Wis.: A-R Editions, 1999); and the article, Catherine Parsons, “An Operatic Skeleton on the Western Frontier: Zitkala-Sa, William F. Hanson, and *The Sun Dance Opera*,” *Women and Music* 5 (2001): 1–30.

⁴⁵ Burton, *American Primitive Music*, 179 and 188.

⁴⁶ Cadman, “The ‘Idealization’ of Indian Music,” 390.

Yet even Cadman recognized that “only one-fifth of all Indian thematic material is valuable in the hands of a composer.” His suggestion for what kind of Indian melody works best is particularly revealing: one should “choose an Indian song or chant that is attractive in its simplicity, one that will stand alone by virtue of its inherent melodic line, and is fairly good in symmetry.”⁴⁷ Ultimately, although Cadman would never have expressed it this way, the melody that is most appropriate for “idealization” is the one that most resembles the melodies of European art music.

Clearly, the goal was never to create Indian-sounding music, but rather to incorporate material from an indigenously American source into the context of traditional composition, whether art song, piano miniatures, opera, or orchestral music. Critic Henry Krehbiel, reacting to one of Cadman and Tsianina’s recitals, recognized just how far from the original source an “idealized” Indian melody had traveled: “[T]here are phases in Indian song which by artistic treatment (which means by sophistication through a large infusion of elements developed by the art of the white man) can be made agreeable to the ear and taste.”⁴⁸ Or, as Gilbert Chase more cynically described, “the indigenous elements are so thickly sugar-coated as to be almost imperceptible.”⁴⁹ Daniel Gregory Mason’s criticism was the most withering of all. He equated “idealization” with “a country maiden [who] should conceal her healthy color under layers of rouge.” He thought it “strange that composers skillful enough to use them should not recognize

⁴⁷ Ibid., 391.

⁴⁸ Comment quoted in Tsianina Blackstone, *Where Trails Have Led Me*, 2nd ed. (Santa Fe, N.M.: Vergara Printing Co., 1970), 57.

⁴⁹ Gilbert Chase, *America’s Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, 1st ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), 399. Elsewhere, an unnamed *New York Times* reviewer, discussing one of Cadman’s lecture recitals given in Santa Fe, New Mexico, puzzled over the fact that “It took a great deal of imagination on the part of any unprejudiced listener to connect Mr. Cadman’s music mentally with that of the Indians. ... On hearing the two kinds of music one after the other, they seemed to have no real connection, except that Mr. Cadman called his pieces ‘Indian’ and professed to base them on Indian subjects.” See “Indian Music,” *New York Times*, 15 August 1926.

the inappropriateness of Wagnerian chromatics and Debussyan whole-tone scale harmonies” when combined with Indian melodies.⁵⁰ Given how subsumed within the European operatic idiom borrowed Indian materials ultimately were, a sarcastic Lawrence Gilman was thus able to thank “a gracious Providence, divinely humorous, [for having] preserved us from a plague of singing Indians.”⁵¹

We are left with a curious paradox. Composers incorporated Indian melodies into their operas because, as an indigenously American product, they would contribute to the formation of a distinct, national idiom. However, since they required “artistic treatment” or “idealization,” much of the very distinctiveness for which they were valued was subsumed into a more mainstream (to use Nicholas Tawa’s term), late-Romantic operatic language, thus obscuring the origins of the borrowed material. While the desire for “local color” and a traditionally operatic sense of “exoticism” does play some role in these composers’ treatments of their Indian materials, they primarily resist the urge to exploit indigenous music as a sign of their Indian characters’ “otherness,” as the following chapter will illustrate. Instead, as James Parakilas has pointed out, these composers seem to “present Indian melodies ... for white audiences to contemplate as part of their national heritage.” Parakilas considers this to be an “appropriation of the exotic as the national.”⁵² Despite the pervasive racial arguments to the contrary, Indian music in the operatic context, more than any other stylistic marker, stakes the claim that these works are indisputably American.

⁵⁰ Mason, *Contemporary Composers*, 263–4.

⁵¹ Lawrence Gilman, “The Red Man in the Theater,” *North American Review* 203 (1916): 616.

⁵² James Parakilas, “The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter, Part II” *Opera Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1994): 54.

Orchestration

One area that would reward additional investigation is an examination of the orchestral scores for these operas. Only Poia's full score was published (in Berlin, but not widely circulated in the United States); manuscript scores of the other works do survive.⁵³ Study and analysis of these materials is an obvious next step for further research, while the lack of available scores and parts remains the greatest impediment to performances today. In the following chapter's stylistic analysis, I will instead work from the published piano-vocal scores of each opera. Because of the widespread availability throughout the country of scores in this form, it was through this medium, more than through stage performances, that my selected composers would have become familiar with each other's works. Nevertheless, discussion of each composer's use of the orchestra regularly appears in period press coverage and performance reviews, thus casting some light onto the style of their orchestral writing. These first-hand accounts offer tantalizing clues about the soundworld of these operas as realized in performance.

As period sources reveal, the orchestration of these operas is one area which illustrates how elements inherited from the European tradition and the desire for American distinctiveness can work together. These composers sought to capitalize on the full coloristic potentials of modern instrumentation. Some were approaching opera writing for the first time having already found success in other genres. Converse and Hadley, for example, had far more experience with

⁵³ Adolph Fürstner, Berlin, published a Poia full score in 1910, a copy of which is at the Library of Congress. Other pertinent archival resources include the Charles Wakefield Cadman Collection, 1905–1936, Special Collections Library, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Pennsylvania State University; Frederick Converse Collection, 1890s–1960s, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Frederick S. Converse Collection of Manuscript Scores, Harriet M. Spaulding Library, New England Conservatory, Boston, Mass.; Frederick S. Converse Papers, 1735–1971, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.; Henry Kimball Hadley Papers, 1898–1965 and Collection of Scores, ca. 1917–ca. 1965, Music Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Tams-Witmark Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Victor Herbert Collection, 1880s–1924, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; and Mary Carr Moore Collection: Musical Compositions, Biographical Material and Documents, 1893–1957, Performing Arts Special Collections Archives, University of California, Los Angeles.

symphonic genres than they had with vocal composition. Victor Herbert too, alongside his string of hit operettas, maintained a successful profile as an orchestral conductor and composer of instrumental works in serious genres including two concertos, a symphonic suite and several tone poems. Thus, it should come as no surprise that their writing for the orchestra was often highly praised. For example, despite the overall negative opinion of Nevin's *Poia* expressed by critics in Berlin, the work's scoring was one feature that received more complimentary notice.

Specifically, the Berlin correspondent to the *New York Daily Tribune* praised Nevin's use of "seven new beating instruments, cymbals, tom-toms, and the xylophone for suggesting the Indian music" which seemed to bring the frontier plains to life.⁵⁴ Arthur Elson found Herbert's orchestration for *Natoma* to be "brilliant, varied, and effective" and acknowledged that "there is no doubt of the composer's skill in many instances."⁵⁵ Frederick Donaghey, music critic at the *Chicago Tribune*, offered the most effusive praise yet for Hadley's orchestral accomplishments in *Azora*, enthusing over the composer's "exquisite writing for the orchestra." He believed it possessed "a vitality present in nothing else of his known to me," a point he repeated a week later in a second review, noting that Hadley "has, so far as I know his other work, surpassed anything else in his catalogue in the literate, effective preparation of the score for orchestra."⁵⁶

An unnamed *Boston Globe* reviewer seemed particularly attentive to the minutia of orchestral deployment. This writer filed separate reports on each of *The Sacrifice*'s four

⁵⁴ "Poia Given in Berlin," *New York Daily Tribune*, 24 April 1910. Note that the initial curtain rises to on-stage tympani, doubling as Indian tribal drums.

⁵⁵ Rupert Hughes and Arthur Elson, *American Composers: A Study of the Music of this Country, and of Its Future*, new rev. ed. (Boston: The Page Company, 1914), 465. For a recorded sampler of what Herbert's score sounded like, see the "Selections from *Natoma*" included on the Naxos American Classics disc of Herbert's orchestral music (8.559027, 2000). This fifteen-minute "potpourri" was arranged and compiled in the year of the opera's premiere by Otto Langey but based upon Herbert's original scoring.

⁵⁶ Frederick Donaghey, "Mr. Hadley's Opera, *Azora*," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 December 1917; and "Monday's Music," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 January 1918.

performances at the Boston Opera. After witnessing the opera's premiere, the critic was at first unconvinced by Converse's use of one instrument in particular. He offered this description of the two love declarations for Chonita from the rivals Burton and Bernal: "Both scenes are treated orchestrally with largeness of style, seriousness and gravity. The function of the tuba in lyric passion is not clearly revealed."⁵⁷ Curiously, the tuba is the only instrument to be called out by name in the entire review. However, after a second hearing, the critic apparently came away with a new insight into these inner workings of the composer's score. Five days after publishing his first review, he now explained, "The orchestra comments upon and emphasized [Burton's] air freely; indeed, in his declaration of love, he had the moral support of the deeper instruments throughout."⁵⁸ Apparently, the tuba's function in "lyric passion" now made more sense in the context of "moral support" to this auditor. Converse's pupil Ruth Severance, in one of the earliest studies of the composer's works, seemed to understand exactly what was going on here. She recognized that Converse "shows theatric imagination, whereas most composers are bound by symphonic limitations."⁵⁹ Ignoring Severance's bias towards personal advocacy, one fact is especially noteworthy here: An American critic, in what was likely the first opera premiere he had ever reviewed, was conscientious enough to allow Converse's "theatric imagination" to change his opinion after a second hearing, rather than simply to write off this unusual passage as either an aberration or a flaw.

Regardless of how much critics might have been impressed with these composers' deployment of their orchestral contingent, the charge of over-orchestrating often accompanied their compliments. The same *Boston Globe* reviewer quoted above praised Converse's "tendency

⁵⁷ "Critical Review of the Opera's Music and Story," *Boston Globe*, 4 March 1911.

⁵⁸ "The Sacrifice is Sung Again," *Boston Globe*, 9 March 1911.

⁵⁹ Severance, "Frederick Shepherd Converse," 115.

to use his entire orchestra ... with freedom” but also noted “a resultant heaviness in the scoring of supposedly lyric passages.”⁶⁰ Reviewing *Natoma*, a *New York Times* critic recognized that “Mr. Herbert writes with skill for the orchestra” and called his orchestration “brilliant and sonorous,” yet complained, “It is sometimes overladen, and he has an undue fondness for explosive effects.”⁶¹ *Azora*, too, drew a similar critique. Frederic Dean worried that Hadley “has made use of the brasses with true Strauss prodigality,” while Arthur Elson described the opera as “too orchestral in style” with “the voices tossing on a sea of passionate polyphony.”⁶²

Such observations, however, in many ways demonstrate that these composers actually achieved their stated aims. Hadley, in an interview, explained his approach to opera writing: “I am convinced that the delineation, the coloring, the song elements of opera can be better done by the orchestra, leaving the voices, in conversation, to carry along the narrative and the action.”⁶³ Likewise, before commencing work on *Natoma*, Herbert proposed a similar method, contradicting librettist Redding’s assertion encountered earlier in this chapter:

I shall use every resource of the modern orchestra. My music will be polyphonic. My inclinations are in all directions to the moderns. It will also be symphonic: by that I mean my opera will not consist of a series of musical numbers loosely conjoined by elementary

⁶⁰ “Critical Review of the Opera’s Music and Story,” *Boston Globe*, 4 March 1911.

⁶¹ “*Natoma* Greeted by Great Audience,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1911. But Herbert was surely intentional about employing an “explosive” orchestration. He once remarked that the “greater sustaining power of the woodwinds gives a beautiful richness of harmony and relieves one from the *torture* (!) of listening to the scratchiness of poorly played strings” (emphasis added). See Victor Herbert, “Artistic Bands” [i.e., military bands], in *The Music of the Modern World*, ed. Anton Seidl, Fanny Morris Smith, and Henry E. Krehbiel (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895–1897), 120.

⁶² Frederic Dean, “The Opera—By, For and With Americans,” *The Bookman* 46 (November 1917): 260; and Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music*, revised to 1925 by Arthur Elson (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 375.

⁶³ Quoted in Herbert R. Boardman, *Henry Hadley: Ambassador of Harmony* (Atlanta, Ga.: Banner Press, 1932), 75–6.

modulations. There will be a continuous, logical and well-knit stream of orchestral development of the dramatic action.⁶⁴

Henry Krehbiel, for one, recognized that Herbert achieved exactly what he set out to do, even though the critic apparently did not at all approve. He complained, “Herbert succeeded better than I could have wished at times in divorcing himself from himself. He is in *Natoma* not the carefree, happy, conventional melodist that he is in his best operettas, but an opera-maker of the modern type who relies upon his orchestra.”⁶⁵ Krehbiel’s critique strikes at the heart of the matter with its suggestion of “an opera-maker of the modern type.” A significant way in which these composers sought to prove that their nation was a viable participant in the operatic realm was by claiming the mantle of modernity.

Perhaps one of the most stunning critical assessments along these lines comes from Glenn Dillard Gunn of the *Chicago Tribune*. Regarding Herbert’s use of the orchestra in *Natoma*, he argues at great length that the composer is indeed operating at the forefront of modern compositional methods—comments that bear quoting in full:

Victor Herbert is master of the orchestra to such an extent that it becomes for him a new instrument. He attains the limits of sonority without suggesting Wagner or Strauss. He discloses a perception for the more delicate shades of tone color without becoming reminiscent of the refinements of Massenet. His harmonic resource includes the vast repertory of effects that belong to the present, yet he can write in the whole tone mode without suggesting Debussy, can bridge the vastest intertonic chasms without hinting at Reger’s ponderous involutions, can court the chromatic instability of the diminished seventh without seeming to echo Liszt.

His description is surely an attempt to contradict the charges of derivativeness leveled by other critics, as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, the key feature here is this critic’s goal to convince his readers that Herbert has not only mastered the techniques of contemporaneous

⁶⁴ From an interview with Herbert, *New York Telegraph*, 8 April 1907, quoted in Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 370. Recall that Redding suggested Herbert’s principal models were Bizet and Verdi—hardly “inclinations in all directions to the moderns,” as Herbert claimed.

⁶⁵ Henry Edward Krehbiel, *More Chapters of Opera* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), 232.

European operatic composition, but also that he has achieved a soundworld so personal that it resembles nothing ever heard before. Indeed, Gunn claims that *Natoma* “is significant because it announces unmistakably a new musical idiom, which, since it is free from any suggestion of present European tendencies, may justly be called American.”⁶⁶ Thus, the opera exemplifies two powerful Nationalist tropes: the pursuit of modernity and the display of individuality. In Gunn’s opinion, orchestration is the vehicle through which Herbert achieved this goal.

Cadman offers a counterexample through a compositional approach that carefully avoids too heavy of an orchestration. Again, it is important to keep in mind his list of “models worth taking”—Bizet, Gounod, Verdi and Puccini—composers who in general privilege vocal melody. Cadman explained that he “decided not to make the mistake of a too ponderous and mastadonic (*sic*) orchestral accompaniment.” He therefore “decided that to employ a too flamboyant means in my instrumentation would be ruinous, since the story did not call for a score of Wagnerian proportions.”⁶⁷ In Cadman’s opinion, apparently, emphasis on the orchestra and orchestral effects was a specifically “Wagnerian” principal. Thus if Nevin, Converse, Herbert and Hadley followed this “Wagnerian” model by deploying an orchestra that drives their musical arguments, then Cadman instead set out to treat his orchestra as if it were “an artistic and excellent piano accompanist” that should remain “in the background for an equally excellent vocalist.” (Note that Cadman regularly appeared as a piano accompanist, especially in performances of his own songs.) In what could be read as a jab at his predecessors, he recognized that “most opera-goers attend the opera to hear the singers rather than to listen altogether to the orchestra. Let our

⁶⁶ Glenn Dillard Gunn, “Herbert’s Opera, *Natoma*, in First Chicago Hearing,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 December 1911.

⁶⁷ Charles Wakefield Cadman, “Some Confessions about Shanewis,” *The Violinist* 23 (1918): 353.

composers admit that, whether they like it or not.”⁶⁸ If his colleagues followed what he considered to be a Wagnerian approach in their use of the orchestra, then Cadman instead chose to trace an Italianate path.

This intentionally restrained use of the orchestra did not prevent the composer from providing *Shanewis* with a colorful score. On the contrary, Cadman seemed rather proud of his achievement:

For “atmosphere” I felt I needed one harp, the celeste (without which no modern operatic score seems complete), bells, tympani, bass and snare drum and cymbals—also triangle; and two Indian drums and tam tams, the one used on stage and the other in the pit with orchestra; sand and gravel rattles of Indian make. In places I have muted my brass (even the trombones); and in the “powwow” scene of act two I make my horns bark like dogs, and in my intermezzo I imitate the Indian women screaming by certain glissando effects in my violins. ... In this manner ... I have endeavored to construct a solid and adequate support and to reflect the drama being enacted upon the stage.⁶⁹

Critics happily recognized his success. One, writing in the *New York Times*, praised the composer’s “mastery of orchestration,” noting that this was indeed “a surprise to many who knew him only as a composer of graceful songs.”⁷⁰ Despite today’s inherited opinion that claims Cadman was only a miniaturist who failed to cope with the demands of larger genres, the period perception of his first staged opera would seem to suggest otherwise.⁷¹ Vivid orchestration of Indian materials was of course the feature that had popularized this musical topic since the mid-nineteenth century. Michael Pisani describes a “ready-made toolbox of exotica,” derived originally from theater music, that by the time of these operas was as standard of a compositional heritage for American composers as was the European tradition. MacDowell’s *Indian Suite* was

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 353–4.

⁷⁰ “*Shanewis*, Indian Opera, Captivates,” *New York Times*, 24 March 1918.

⁷¹ Nicholas Tawa, for instance, describes the score as “a string of songs” lacking a “serious attempt ... to unify the larger musical sections” even though it “did not bar him from conjuring up fitting atmospheric impressions with his orchestra.” See Tawa, *Mainstream Music of Early Twentieth Century America*, 95.

the principal model that these composers would have been familiar with, but the trend in American concert music dates back to Bristow and Heinrich.⁷²

While these five composers all managed to exceed expectations with their impressive use of the orchestra, Mary Carr Moore's *Narcissa* is the one exception within this group. She lacked the experience scoring for full orchestra that was an acknowledged strength of her male colleagues. The topic of orchestration was most likely included in her study with her Leipzig conservatory-trained uncle, John Harraden Pratt, but a more relevant influence came simply from hearing opera orchestras live in the theater. More than in any other aspect of composition, Moore was very much a novice when it came to writing for the orchestra. Her results were hampered even further by her inability to secure the full, prescribed instrumentation for *Narcissa*'s Seattle premiere (see chapter 2). Critics recognized this flaw. Paul Hedrick, writing in the *Seattle Daily Times*, felt that the poor orchestration was "the chief defect in the work" and found "periods of emptiness and lack of substance in the orchestration," while Carl Presley for *Musical America* complained that "the score is at times extremely thin and at other times overbalanced." However, each critic believed, respectively, that Moore's "orchestration throughout can be greatly improved" and that these orchestral weaknesses were "a remediable matter."⁷³ Given *Narcissa*'s continued success in later revival performances, we can safely assume that, with further experience and superior performance circumstances, Moore did indeed strengthen this aspect of her score.

⁷² For an overview of these precedents, see Pisani, "'I'm an Indian Too,'" in *The Exotic in Western Music*, 220–46, quote on 230. Also see chapters three and four of Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music*. Although Indian topics in European operas and concert music were popular during the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries, these works were not familiar to most American composers at the time, nor do the period's critics ever make comparisons to this repertoire. Thus, Indianist influence coming from Europe to America is highly unlikely.

⁷³ Hedrick was quick to reassure readers that one should not pass "too severe critical judgment on Mrs. Moore for this fact. Considering all sides of the matter fairly, one cannot withhold approval of *Narcissa*." See Paul C. Hedrick, "*Narcissa* Approved by Large Local Audience," *Seattle Daily Times*, 23 April 1912; and Carl Presley, "Historical Opera of the Northwest," *Musical America* (11 May 1912): 5.

* * * * *

The processes of stylistic negotiation underway in this group of works is most evident in their explicitly Indianist passages, for here European techniques of opera writing merge with a distinctively American musical source. Despite the fact that this chapter's separate areas of focus find their clearest realization in such passages, this was perhaps the most critically divisive element of these operas' soundworld. For example, Cora Lyman expressed strong disapproval, asking, "what could be more incongruous and undesirable than a ... savage Indian theme introduced into a context of cultured, polished Wagnerian harmony, such as Nevin gave us in *Poia*?" Contradicting Lyman's view, Frederick Martens instead praised the opera's "outstanding lyric pages" and described the work as "a musicianly score using Wagnerian procedure in the treatment of actual Indian tribal melodies."⁷⁴ Thus, it is to operatic Indians that we shall first turn, in the next chapter's analysis of the musical style of this emergent school of American National Opera.

⁷⁴ Cora Lyman, "Our Most Belated Art," *The Forum* (March 1914): 437; and Frederick H. Martens, *A Thousand and One Nights of Opera* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1926), 237. Again, note the blanket application of the "Wagnerian" label to categorize these operas.

CHAPTER 5 — Soundworld II: A Stylistic Analysis

[L]et every composer in America try to write music which is good music, whether it smacks of a European conservatory or of the broad, free reaches of the Far West. The essential thing is to make music which shall calm, shall inspire, shall call forth pure and ennobling thoughts, shall fill the needs of the present hour, but shall also point to the next hour as presaging something finer, something higher to strive for.¹

—Charles Wakefield Cadman

There is no clearer statement of the selected opera writers' shared compositional aims than this. Even before Cadman had begun *Shanewis*, his comment encapsulates the intent of his later project and those of his colleagues. Indeed, musical elements that “smack of a European conservatory” and of the “free reaches of the Far West” (or by symbolic extension, the Aztec realm in *Azora*) co-exist in all six of these scores. Cadman's phraseology suggests that such music might draw upon one “or” another of these sources, but in these operas, a variety of musical strands appear side by side, synthesized into a heterogeneous whole. Although Cadman was not thinking about opera writing specifically, the explicit tone of moral uplift—music which “shall call forth pure and ennobling thought”—often accompanied discussions of operatic ideals. Their musical enactment of the New World on the operatic stage sought to elevate this hemisphere's history to “classic” status. As in their librettos, this was achieved through a careful blending of musical ingredients, combining inherited methods with distinctly American sources and sounds. Delving into the scores, what can at first seem like a myriad of competing influences—those described in the previous chapter—ultimately combine to form an emergent

¹ Charles Wakefield Cadman, “The ‘Idealization’ of Indian Music,” *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1915): 396.

style of American opera. This style is unarguably one that arises through amalgamation, the sum of its component parts.

Rather than analyses of individual operas, this chapter offers a topically organized exploration of comparable passages drawn from all six scores. My focus remains on the consistent ways in which these diverse opera writers employed related musical materials or pursued similar compositional goals. Along the way, my discussion will be amplified by the period's critical discourse that assessed each composer's results. Given the relative unfamiliarity of these operas, numerous music examples are included to help acquaint the reader with the soundworld of each score. One recurrent theme motivates these composers: In answer to the call for American National Opera, they sought to prove that their works could simultaneously be distinctly American and measure up to the inherited standards of the European canon.

Music for Indians

Despite the decision to employ Indian musical materials as a key indicator of New-World provenance, there was no clear agreement about how to accomplish this within the operatic context. Settings cover the musical spectrum from exoticized quotations of "primitive" melodies to highly "idealized" arrangements in which the Indian source is no longer recognizable within its new context. These two poles often coexist within a given composer's score. The first approach contributes that most valuable of operatic elements—local color—while the latter advances the argument that American composers can indeed offer a distinctive contribution to the traditions of European opera. Indeed, the examples found in these operas reveal potential solutions to what Michael Pisani recognized as the central compositional problem: "how to establish a theoretical relationship between the melodies of Native American song—which are

almost exclusively sung without any accompanying harmonic instruments—and Western music.”² Composers could draw upon a collection of stock musical traits, many of which still seem recognizably “Indian” to us today: open fifth drone basses, tom-tom drum rhythms, pentatonic or gapped-scale melodies, falling melodic contours, and often non-functional harmonic motion.³ Dvořák’s suggestions provided the impetus for turning to this material (see chapter 1). Composers like Edward MacDowell, Henry Gilbert and John Fillmore established models for composing within this soundworld and set off “a wave [of Indianist composition] that reached its apex around 1911”—that is, right around the time when these operas were composed.⁴ These same musical traits appeared in contemporaneous popular songs on Indian topics, in theatrical incidental music, on Broadway, and likewise accompanied Indian scenes in silent films and later sound-film Westerns.⁵ Clearly, as Pisani summarizes, these opera writers are simply joining in a tradition of “Indianesque” composition that “relies on devices embodying complex layers of meaning that had accrued over decades—if not centuries.”⁶

The expected Indian musical signifiers are firmly in place in Nevin’s *Poia*. Unlike some of his colleagues, Nevin came into direct contact with live performances of Indian music in an authentic context—during his visits to the Montana Blackfeet Indian reservation, as the press

² Michael Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 213.

³ For a thorough discussion of these and other related musical identifiers, see Pisani’s “Lexicon of Exotic Musical Devices” in “Exotic Sounds in the Native Land: Portrayals of North American Indians in Western Music” (Ph.D. diss., Eastman School of Music, 1996), 99–100 and 116–9; and the more concise summary in “‘I’m an Indian Too’: Creating Native American Identities in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Music,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 229–30.

⁴ For a discussion of works by American composers which used Indian materials from the years prior to when my selected operas were composed, see Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music*, 182–260. Quote on *ibid.*, 211.

⁵ For a discussion of these other outlets for Indian-themed composition, see *ibid.*, 243–307.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

was keen to point out.⁷ Poia's true *heldentenor* aria which concludes the first act gives the opera's first explicit example of Nevin's Indianist style (ex. 5.1). The tenor's part is purely declamatory. The orchestra, on the other hand, presents an "Indian War-Song," specifically labeled as a borrowed melody by Nevin in the published score.⁸ The accompaniment's persistent eighth notes carry an aggressive war-drum rhythm, while a falling chromatic bass motion leads the melody into unexpected harmonic terrain. The tonic of e minor falls through both b minor and f-sharp minor before a non-functional cadence returns to the tonic. The quoted melody itself (the upper voice in the orchestral reduction) is pentatonic, repetitive, rhythmically strong, and descending in overall contour. Although the mood is entirely different, a similarly stereotyped Indianist style of orchestral writing appears as the introduction to the third act (ex. 5.2). Listeners in the United States and at the Berlin premiere would surely recognize the drone fifth bass and tom-tom rhythm as Indianist signifiers here.

⁷ See for instance, "American Opera in Berlin," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 April 1910. The author explains that Nevin "gathered Indian love scenes [*sic*] and religious hymns which are woven into the opera."

⁸ Full bibliographic details for piano-vocal scores appear in Part VIII of the bibliography. Music examples are straightforward transcriptions from the published score unless otherwise noted.

POIA

Then shall I game with death To win or

Allegro feroce

mp *sempre cresc.* *mf*

(Indian War-Song)

lose the joy of life.

f

Ex. 5.1: Nevin, *Poia*, Poia's heroic aria (p. 48)

Lento

mp *cresc.*

Ex. 5.2: Nevin, *Poia*, Act III introduction (p. 115)

Nevin's Indianist passages are not always this intentionally explicit. Indeed, one of the defining features of his score is the ease with which the composer shifts between an Indianist soundworld and a non-exotic idiom, devoid of specific Indian signifiers. For instance, in a choral hymn of praise to the sun god Natosi in the second act, Nevin again quotes a collected melody—here identified as an “Indian Ceremonial Song”—but employs a conventional, even conservative style of choral writing that sounds much earlier than its post-1900 point of origin would suggest. Four-part voice leading and clearly functional E-flat major harmonies disguise the material's Indian origin, despite a repetitive melodic shape and four-beat phrases that expand beyond the overall triple meter (see the second system of ex. 5.3a). The chorus's subsequent strain, with its arpeggiated accompaniment, is even further removed from Nevin's Indianist style (ex. 5.3b). The homophonic choral rhythm betrays a greater kinship with Protestant hymnody—an important ingredient of Moore's *Narcissa*, to be discussed below—than it does with sounds suggestive of an Indian ceremonial event. This is, of course, a practical compositional decision too. Rather than requiring an opera chorus to come to terms with an unfamiliar and potentially unnatural musical idiom, Nevin supplies material that simplifies the issues of stage coordination and requires the minimum of rehearsal preparation.

CHORUS (in distance)

Lord of light, Na - to - - si, Na - ture bows

Maestoso
sempre mp

(Indian ceremonial song)

be - fore thee, Na - to - - si, Na - to - si.

be - fore thee, Na - to - si, Na - to - si, Na - to - si.

Ex. 5.3a: Nevin, *Poia*, chorus in praise of Natosi (p. 65)

Lord of life, Na - to - - si! Earth sur -

rend - ers to thee, Earth sur - rend - ers to thee,

Ex. 5.3b: Nevin, *Poia*, chorus in praise of Natosi (p. 66-7)

In these excerpts, perhaps Nevin decided that an earthy, exoticized Indianism would be inappropriate for the scene's "heavenly" setting. The audience, like Poia, is here witnessing the appearance of the sun god, ruler of the universe, for the first time. The use of an Indian melody identifies the legend's cultural origins while its grandiose musical setting heightens the stateliness of the scene. As Edward Hipsher observed, Nevin's borrowed "native melodies have been introduced into the score ... in such a manner that they become an integral part of its texture." He recognized that Nevin's "aim has been not so much to reproduce the actual music and words of the Indians," but rather to "interpret the Indian in his life and manner of thought,

and at the same time to mold the work to the requirements of the operatic stage.”⁹ Indeed, this last point is the essential one: only by meeting the “requirements of the operatic stage” did any American work stand the chance of receiving a production.

In Herbert’s *Natoma*, the Indian element is not dependent upon actual borrowings as it is in *Poia*. Instead, as the composer himself discussed, he only “attempted to imitate Indian music. But I have used no special Indian theme. Indian themes are all very short and unharmonized. I have tried to get the effect of Indian music without using the thing itself.”¹⁰ These “imitations,” however, since they provide material for the title character, ultimately become the score’s predominant musical element. Unifying *Natoma*’s Indianist music is her so-called “theme of fate,” a leitmotif heard throughout the opera at the most dramatic and consequential turning points in the plot. The fact that musical notation of this five-note motive was regularly included in newspaper coverage attests to its overall significance. The image below, taken from a *New York Times* article that ran a month before the New York premiere, shows the motive notated in Herbert’s own hand (fig. 5.1).¹¹



Figure 5.1: *Natoma*’s “Theme of Fate”

⁹ Edward Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1927), 342.

¹⁰ Interview in “Victor Herbert’s First Serious Opera,” *New York Times*, 10 October 1910.

¹¹ Graphic extracted from “Grand Opera Written by Americans to Be Given Here,” *New York Times*, 22 January 1911.

Within the opera, among other appearances, the theme follows Natoma's prediction that Paul will fall in love with Barbara (ex. 5.4a), the moment when Natoma decides to seek sanctuary after killing Alvarado and enters Father Peralta's mission (ex. 5.4b), and at the fall of the final curtain (ex. 5.4c). This network of appearances succinctly illustrates the opera's overall plot trajectory. Herbert's orchestral setting, at least, already seems to know the title character's eventual fate. The motive is boxed in the excerpts below.

NATOMA

when you see her, _____ you will love _____ her! _____

ff

sfz

3

Ex. 5.4a: Herbert, *Natoma*, theme of fate (p. 48)

sempre più tranquillo

declamato

rit.

molto ritenente

fp

ppp

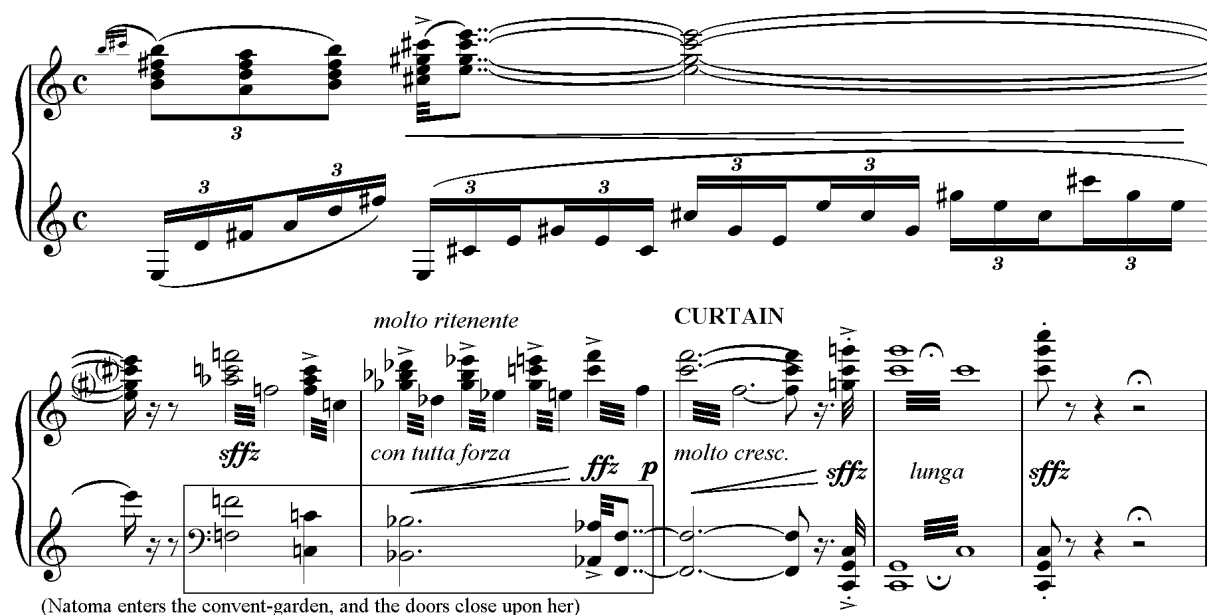
f dim.

(Natoma goes up stage)

(she goes to steps of church)

(she drops dagger and falls at the feet of Peralta)

Ex. 5.4b: Herbert, *Natoma*, theme of fate (p. 287-8)



Ex. 5.4c: Herbert, *Natoma*, theme of fate (p. 335)

While this motive's minor mode, falling contour, gapped-scale construction, and reverse-dotted rhythm were all recognized as quintessential features of Indian music by the opera's first listeners, the one number that more than anything else marked this score as Indianist is the "Dagger Dance" (ex. 5.5). The most popular number in the opera, this excerpt quickly became a staple of the silent-film repertoire and regularly appeared on concert programs outside of the operatic context. Michael Pisani has traced the influence of the "Dagger Dance" upon silent film cues such as Otto Langey's "Indian Agitato" and Walter Simon's "Indian War Dance," in particular. A 1934 Schirmer publication of *Choruses from Opera* included this number, even though it is not choral in the original work.¹² A keyboard arrangement of the dance appeared in

¹² Pisani even finds traces of the melody in the Theodore Hamm Brewing Co. radio and TV jingle in use in the 1950s. See "Exotic Sounds in the Native Land," 399.

print as recently as the 1988 Reader's Digest collection of *Popular Classics*.¹³ The cultural ubiquity of this number and its persistent influence should not be underestimated.

The musical score is for a piece titled "Dagger Dance" by Herbert, Natoma. It is written for piano and organ. The tempo is marked "Maestoso". The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score consists of three systems of music. Each system has a first ending bracket labeled with a circled 8. The first system includes markings for *sfz* and *simile*. The second system includes the marking *staccatiss.*. The third system includes the marking *ff*. The bass line features a drone fifth and a descending melodic outline.

Ex. 5.5: Herbert, *Natoma*, "Dagger Dance" (p. 284)

The drone fifth bass, descending melodic outline—an eight-measure process repeated twice in this excerpt—and sharp rhythmic accents are the salient features. The dissonant chords at the start of the second system heighten the tension of the scene by contrasting with the surrounding triadic harmonies, suggesting the ferocity soon to be unleashed when Natoma rushes past her dance challenger, Castro, and stabs Alvarado at the end of the number. Herbert seems to suggest, here and elsewhere, that static accompaniments are “primitive” and therefore appropriately suited for Natoma’s music. Much of her narrative telling the “Legend of the

¹³ See *Popular Classics: A Treasury of All-Time Family Favorites for Piano & Organ* (Pleasantville, N.Y.: Reader's Digest Association, 1988). Surprisingly, the arrangement does not appear in the section of “Popular Melodies from Great Operas,” but instead is in “New and Old Classics from Film, Radio and TV.” The introductory commentary describes it as “a melody that most people know but few *realize* they know” (see p. 76). Certainly, the piece makes for strange company alongside Sousa’s “Liberty Bell” March (given as the Monty Python TV theme) and John Williams’s “Raiders March.”

Amulet,” for example, unfolds over an exclusive use of parallel augmented triads (ex. 5.6). In other passages, however, Herbert echoes a broader range of Indianist models. The lengthy orchestral Prelude to Act III likely reminded listeners of MacDowell’s *Indian Suite*, particularly the emotive seriousness of the “Dirge” movement, as Herbert draws upon the full power of the orchestra and again presents an “imitation” Indian melody (ex. 5.7). Natoma’s Lullaby, or “Song of the Hawk,” on the other hand, looks to Cadman’s *Four American Indian Songs* from 1909—songs Herbert knew well—and, through its gently harmonized accompaniment, offers an “idealization” as fine as any of Cadman’s settings (ex. 5.8).¹⁴

NATOMA

Soon there came an aw - ful fam - ine, And his peo - ple paled with

hun - ger, Paled with hun - ger and the fam - ine,

Ex. 5.6: Herbert, *Natoma*, “Legend of the Amulet” (p. 36)

¹⁴ This set contains Cadman’s most famous song, “From the Land of the Sky-Blue Waters,” with a comparably simple accompaniment as that of Natoma’s Lullaby.

8^{va} 8^{va}

loco

Ex. 5.7: Herbert, *Natoma*, Prelude to Act III (p. 291)

NATOMA

Be - ware of the hawk, my ba - by, Be - ware of the hawk, my child! It

(etc.)

flies in wide, wide cir - cles And turns up - on the wing, *p subito*

Ex. 5.8: Herbert, *Natoma*, "Song of the Hawk" (p. 294)

Herbert's efforts at establishing an Indian tone aroused much divergent criticism, comments that say as much about contemporary views of American Indian culture and musical practice as they do about Herbert's music. In the proponents' corner, the advancement of an Americanist agenda seemed of the highest priority, with partisans keen to claim that Herbert's development of an "authentic" Indian character resulted in a distinctively American opera. Arthur Farwell, for one, extended an especially enthusiastic welcome, arguing paradoxically that Herbert's "Indian themes, whether borrowed entire or simulated, are authentic in their quality." He praised Herbert's "remarkable sympathy" in handling Indian materials and commended his ability to "retain their peculiar character and 'color'" in music "both impressive and convincing." Indeed, Farwell even went so far as to suggest that *Natoma* "is a thorough justification" of the use of Indian materials in American composition.¹⁵ George Upton found the Act III Prelude to be "the strongest number in the opera."¹⁶ A *New York Times* reviewer agreed, commenting on a later concert performance of this orchestral extract and describing it as "the moment in which [Herbert] had allowed himself the largest, most sustained, most dignified, and most developed musical utterance."¹⁷ An unnamed writer in *The Independent* specifically called out the Indianist passages for praise, noting that *Natoma*'s Lullaby is "one of the finest things of the kind in existence—a number which haunts the memory." This writer also claimed that the "Dagger Dance" was "doubtless harmonized in the way the Indians themselves would have done it, had

¹⁵ Arthur Farwell, "American Opera on American Themes: Artistic Significance of Herbert's *Natoma* and Converse's *Sacrifice*," *The American Review of Reviews* 43 (1911): 445. In an effort that would seem to match Farwell's desire for "authenticity," Rosemary Gainer went to great pains to determine *Natoma*'s probable tribal origin. Gainer concludes that she must have been a member of the Chumash tribe. See "*Natoma*, by Victor Herbert: An American 'Grand' Opera?" *Opera Journal* 29, no. 4 (1996): 16.

¹⁶ He went on to conclude that *Natoma* was "an opera of great merit and of much higher standard than any of its numerous predecessors," ultimately naming the work Herbert's "masterpiece." George P. Upton, *The Standard Operas: Their Plots and Their Music*, rev. ed. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1914), 123 and 124.

¹⁷ "The Philharmonic Concert," *New York Times*, 19 February 1912.

they known harmony or used orchestras like ours” and ultimately concluded that *Natoma* “is much better, musically, than Puccini’s [*La Fanciulla del West*].”¹⁸ A similar comparison came from the *Chicago Tribune*’s critic, Glenn Dillard Gunn, who believed that the “Dagger Dance” “is quite as effective as the dance of Salome, and if less important artistically, is far more real.” Overall, he found Herbert’s “Indian themes” to be “vital. They are not merely effective. They have dignity, character, and power. ... They are embellished with orchestral hues that surpass in originality and in beauty the imposing range of Puccini’s tonal palette.”¹⁹ For these critics, Herbert’s work was just as good if not better than that of his European contemporaries, or at least they felt it necessary to advance such an argument. They clearly understood that operas like *Natoma* required such endorsements if they were ever to make the jump into the international repertory.

Yet Herbert’s Indianism did not so thoroughly convince all of the opera’s auditors. One *New York Times* critic allowed that Herbert “has been ingenious in his use of these Indian elements, to make their rhythmic and melodic characteristics count for their utmost. It may be that they count for too much. There is undoubtedly a monotony in their frequent repetition.”²⁰ Indeed, “monotony” was the charge most frequently leveled at Herbert’s use of Indian materials. Arthur Elson complained that the Indian-type passages “are pushed forward rather noticeably, and the ear sometimes grows tired of them.”²¹ H. J. Whigham reflected the same sentiment, complaining that the composer’s “tendency is to make the music assigned to *Natoma* a little

¹⁸ “Victor Herbert’s *Natoma*,” *The Independent* 70 (1911): 660.

¹⁹ Glenn Dillard Gunn, “Herbert’s Opera, *Natoma*, in First Chicago Hearing,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 December 1911.

²⁰ “*Natoma* Greeted By Great Audience,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1911.

²¹ Rupert Hughes and Arthur Elson, *American Composers: A Study of the Music of this Country, and of Its Future*, new rev. ed. (Boston: The Page Company, 1914), 465. This quotation comes from Elson’s revision.

monotonous.” Nor did he buy into the notion that Herbert had achieved “authenticity.” Instead, he seemed grateful that Natoma’s music takes up “only a coloring” of Indian music, explaining that “the result is no more truly Indian than is the rhythm and language which Mr. Redding has borrowed from [Longfellow’s] *Hiawatha*.” He staunchly believed that this “Indian coloring” “does not in the least make his opera American as we understand the word.”²² As always, the issue of whether or not this musical style counted as “American” remained irreconcilable, with partisans of each viewpoint staunchly defending their own opinion.

Indian music plays a much smaller role in *The Sacrifice*, but despite its infrequent appearance in Converse’s score, according to critics it remained one of the opera’s more memorable elements. Only two of the four Indian characters in the opera are given distinctively Indian music: Tomasa, Chonita’s “old Indian servant,” who is gifted with a seer-like ability to predict the upcoming destruction brought about by the white Americans; and Pablo, Tomasa’s son and Bernal’s servant who is aiding the Mexican resistance against the American army. Pablo, standing offstage, sings the opera’s lone quoted Indian melody, ostensibly set to the tune’s original vocables (ex. 5.9).

PABLO (...a weird Indian song is heard outside in the grove.)

mf O wi yo ho wi yo ho wi yo Ho ho we to a ha e e

pp

Ped.

Ex. 5.9: Converse, *The Sacrifice*, Pablo’s Indian song (p. 92-3)

²² H. J. Whigham, “Echoes of the Stage,” *Town and Country* (4 March 1911): 24.

Converse uses Indian music here precisely for its strangeness, a quality emphasized in his distinctive harmonization. Listeners surely reacted to the unusual, non-diatonic melody. Even Chonita asks her beloved Bernal, “What is that weird music?” The song serves as a warning to Bernal, interrupting his long love duet with Chonita and informing him that it is time to depart. Rather than equating Indian music with “Americanness,” Converse’s Indian melody is a decided signifier of the exotic other. Not only does Chonita explicitly remark upon its strangeness, but this brief song also comes from a character who has sided with the enemy of the Americans.

The Indian passage that received the most critical attention is Tomasa’s first-act aria often referred to as the “March of the Races.” (For a discussion of this aria’s text, see chapter 3.) The *Boston Globe* reviewer twice praised this scene during the opera’s four-performance run. These comments appeared the day after the premiere:

Her lament upon [the Indians’] departed glory is elegiac in its majesty and combines a tragic passion with the solemnity of a requiem for the dead. The musical setting here has strength and dignity and employs a theme suggestive of primitive and rugged Indian character. The *largamento*, extending to the climax of her vision, is among the best parts of the work.²³

A subsequent review printed five days later admired how “Tomasa again flamed into elemental rage.”²⁴ Both Olin Downes and Arthur Farwell agreed with this assessment. Downes considered Tomasa’s scene to be “one of the most broadly melodic movements of the score,” while Farwell felt that Converse’s unique combination of textual imagery and Indian musical material “resulted in more distinctly characterizing [Tomasa] than the other persons in the drama.”²⁵

²³ “Critical Review of the Opera’s Music and Story,” *Boston Globe*, 4 March 1911. The actual markings in the score indicate first “Largamente e sonoro” and later “Largamente: con elevazione.” This second passage is given as ex. 5.10b.

²⁴ “*The Sacrifice* Is Sung Again,” *Boston Globe*, 9 March 1911.

²⁵ Olin Downes, “Synopsis,” in Frederick S. Converse and John Macy, *The Sacrifice: An Opera in Three Acts* (New York: H.W. Gray Company, 1911), 7; and Farwell, “American Opera on American Themes,” 447.

The opening melody, presented by the orchestra with occasional pitches doubled by the voice, functions as an Indian-type leitmotif throughout the scene (ex. 5.10a). The Indian provenance is made clear through the descending phrase endings (on “races” and “oft foretold”) and a lingering hint of the tom-tom drum rhythm (eighth-note pattern in the treble of the third measure and in the bass of the fourth measure). The mood of a funeral march pervades the entire scene. Converse’s careful text setting and correct rhythmic stresses allow for the clearest possible delivery of Tomasa’s grave concerns. The aria builds to a massive climax in which the formerly contained eighth-note pattern now resounds from the full orchestra, passed back and forth between the bass and treble instruments (ex. 5.10b). Given Converse’s masterful compositional display and the critical praise it received, one cannot help but recognize the unjust neglect that these scores currently face.

TOMASA

'Tis the march of ra - ces. This has the Hla - hi

Tempo di marcia ma largamente

f *mf*

sfz

oft fore-told. He who is wise in the wis - dom of Nor - wan.

sfz *p*

Ex. 5.10a: Converse, *The Sacrifice*, “The March of the Races” (p. 8)

Largamente, con elevazione

Fare Thee well, wild bloom-ing West - land! Fare Thee well, wild bloom-ing West - land!

Piu animato, con fuoco

Ex. 5.10b: Converse, *The Sacrifice*, “The March of the Races” (p.15)

In comparison to the elaborate array of techniques found in *Natoma* and *The Sacrifice*, Mary Carr Moore’s use of Indian materials in *Narcissa* seems relatively simplistic, harmonically static and rhythmically repetitive. Representative examples include an Act II excerpt from the Indian prophetess Waskema, which especially in the published keyboard reduction resembles the kind of piece a child might learn in his or her piano lessons (ex. 5.11).²⁶ Similarly, the “Indian Dance” which concludes the act might seem more appropriate in a silent film Western than at the opera house (ex. 5.12). The choral basses carry the expected tom-tom drum rhythms and the orchestra presents a drone fifth bass, but the conflicting layers of vocables are difficult to take

²⁶ This material also reappears in the third act, when Waskema, joined later by Delaware Tom, again tries to turn the Indians against the missionaries, warning against “the Boston’s evil talk” and “Cultus medicine” (see page 168–170 of the published piano-vocal score).

seriously. Perhaps, Moore is fearful of dragging her operatic Indians too far into the realm of art music, and thus provides them with intentionally “primitive” settings.

WASKEMA

The Del-a-ware is right. De-spised, pur-sued, His peo-ple
were like dogs flung forth! Wau-wau-de-late.

Ex. 5.11: Moore, *Narcissa*, Waskema in Act II (p. 82)

INDIANS (With dance)

Hi, hi, Hi yi yi yi hi yi yi yi, Hi yi yi yi hi yi yi yi hi yi hi yi hi yi yi yi
He ya he ya he ya he ya, He ya he ya he ya he ya he ya he ya he ya he ya
Hu ye hu ye hu ye ye ye, Hu ye ye ye hu ye ye ye, Hu ye hu ye hu ye hu ye ye ye
Hu yu hu yu hu yu hu yu, Hu yu yu yu hu yu yu yu, Hu yu yu yu hu yu yu yu hu yu hu yu hu yu hu yu

Ex. 5.12: Moore, *Narcissa*, Indian chorus and dance (p. 139)

Despite the narrower compositional craft on display in these numbers, local critics nevertheless seemed quite impressed. Paul C. Hedrick, writing for the *Seattle Daily Times*, offered this opinion:

For some of her materials Mrs. Moore has gone faithfully and accurately to Indian music and motifs, gleaned from the tribes and tribal traditions of the aborigines of the Pacific Northwest. It is to be doubted if any American writer has so faithfully handled so-called Indian music as has Mrs. Moore. For this reason there are many periods in *Narcissa* during which the ear of the trained musician is gratefully conscious of something absolutely new and very well done.²⁷

The key phrase here is “faithfully handled”—other composers’ more complex settings are, in this writer’s opinion, apparently too far removed from their point of origin. Similarly, in a review of the 1925 San Francisco revival, Gem Harris believed that, “In her adaptation of original Indian melodies..., Mrs. Moore has shown rare skill.” He found her Indian passages to be “thrilling in their freedom and spontaneity of expression.”²⁸ In comparison to the other composers’ uses of similar material, it would seem as if both Moore and her critics were somewhat out of their element. Moore’s examples are neither “absolutely new” nor do they show “rare skill,” even if some observers found these passages to be unquestionably effective in the theater.

Edward Hipsher is perhaps being overly generous when he describes how Moore “mellowed [her Indian materials] with an Anglo-Saxon touch that makes for a certain American wholesomeness pertinent to the subject.”²⁹ Something of Hipsher’s sense of “American

²⁷ Paul C. Hedrick, “*Narcissa* Approved by Large Local Audience,” *Seattle Daily Times*, 23 April 1912. Perhaps the costuming had something to do with Hedrick’s enthusiasm for Moore’s Indian music. A week earlier, the newspaper printed this description: “Picturesque Indian costuming will be one of the features of the production of the grand opera *Narcissa* at The Moore next week. In a majority of instances the singers will be garbed in the genuine Indian habiliments loaned to Mary Carr Moore ... by Major Lee Moorhouse of Pendleton, whose collection is one of the most noteworthy in existence. A number of the articles of Indian dress have rare historical value, a headpiece being included, for example, that was worn by an Indian chief at the massacre of General Custer on the Little Big Horn in 1876.” See “Prominent Characters in Indian Opera,” *Seattle Sunday Times*, 14 April 1912.

²⁸ Gem Harris, “*Narcissa*,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 83 (October 1925): 380.

²⁹ Hipsher, *American Opera*, 332.

wholesomeness” likely arises from Moore’s limited range of accompanimental options, most of which are derived from the parlor ballad. For example, as the Indian chief’s son Elijah announces his plans to lead the braves of the tribe on a trading expedition, any lingering Indian characteristics in his vocal melody are subsumed into an unmistakably “mellow, Anglo-Saxon” accompaniment (ex. 5.13).³⁰

ELIJAH

p

South - ward now, the war - ing sun I'll

p

fol - low o - ver hill and lea.

Ex. 5.13: Moore, *Narcissa*, Elijah’s departure (p. 186)

Even though *Azora* presents exclusively indigenous characters until the arrival of the conquistadors in the final act, Hadley primarily avoids the Indianist mode of expression. Even exoticism is underplayed; the composer seems content to revel in the colors and harmonies of then-modern late Romanticism. As Pauline MacArthur noted in 1921, “Hadley would have

³⁰ For a further analysis of Moore’s use of Indian materials, see Moiya Callahan, “Mary Carr Moore’s *Narcissa*” (M.M. thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1999), 46–53. For mention of Moore’s first contact with the collecting efforts of the early ethnographers, see Karen J. Blair, “The Seattle Ladies Musical Club, 1890–1930,” in *Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History*, ed. G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 127.

written differently had he never heard of Wagner or Richard Strauss.”³¹ While the opera’s opening invocation to Totec, issued by the High Priest Canek, might seem to present an opportunity to employ an Indianist musical style, the composer instead pursues a more generic exoticism, consisting of parallel triadic motion and a flatted second scale degree (ex. 5.14).

Ex. 5.14: Hadley, *Azora*, Invocation to Totec (p. 5)

An explicitly Indianist sound occurs only once in the entire opera. Act I closes with a large choral scene during which the Aztec people prepare for a human sacrifice and a “Barbaric Dance” is performed (ex. 5.15).³² Here, all the hallmarks of Indian music are on display: tribal drum rhythm in the bass, a descending melodic contour, non-functional harmonic motion, and a return of the flatted second from Canek’s opening invocation. The minor-major seventh harmonies in the second and third measures of the excerpt are particularly “colorful” in this context. Note, however, that Hadley’s “barbaric” observances remain safely within the conservative confines of opera-house exoticism. His pagan ritualistic music comes nowhere near the modernist primitivism of Stravinsky’s slightly earlier *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Rather than attempting to recreate a pre-Columbian Aztec soundworld, he seems content to provide music for

³¹ Pauline Arnoux MacArthur, “Henry Hadley’s Place in American Music,” *Musical America* 35, no. 1 (29 October 1921): 24.

³² This same material is further developed in the sizable orchestral prelude that precedes the second act.

the kind of stage spectacle that made works like Verdi's *Aida* (set in Egypt) or Delibes's *Lakmé* (set in India) so popular at the time.

CHORUS OF AZTEC PRIESTS AND PEOPLE

Earth - ly sym - bol of ev - er - liv - ing pow'r, Take the Sac - ri - fice we

bring, Let our mes - sen - gers ap - proach

Ex. 5.15: Hadley, *Azora*, “Barbaric Dance” (p. 82)

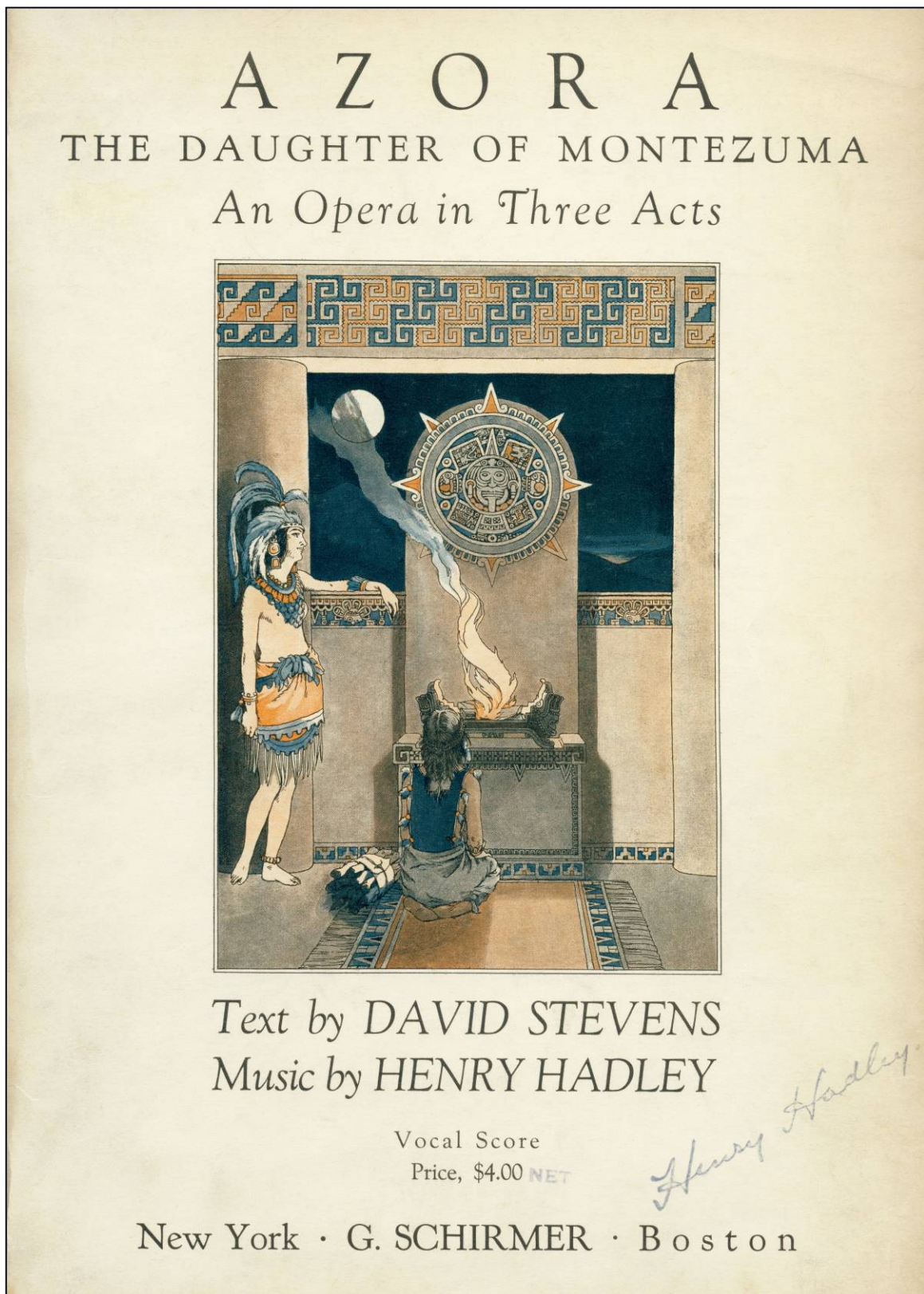
Nevertheless, these passages received more critical praise than any other parts of the opera. Frederick Donaghey in the *Chicago Tribune* complimented the first act's “delectable dances” which “are without restraint.” The *New York Times* critic specifically listed the “Barbaric Dance” among the opera's highlights.³³ Frederic Dean, writing for *The Bookman*, predicted that this “hectic affair” would “become popular,” explaining that here “Hadley is at his

³³ Frederick Donaghey, “Mr. Hadley's Opera *Azora*,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 December 1917; and “Hadley's *Azora* Given,” *New York Times*, 28 January 1918.

wildest and best. ... Unexpected rhythms, dissonances that melt into delicious harmonies, weird and telling combinations of instruments—all are used as aids to a sensuous, swinging melody that intoxicates and compels an ever-increasing fervor.”³⁴ Elsewhere in the score, however, even for other Aztec ceremonial scenes or religious observances, Hadley’s simply seems disinterested in establishing a uniquely New-World sound for his singing Aztecs. More than through his music, Hadley allowed stagecraft, set design, and costuming to advance this aspect of the opera. Even the visually arresting cover to the published piano-vocal score suggests a greater exoticism than most of the music contained therein (fig. 5.2).

³⁴ Frederic Dean, “The Opera—By, For and With Americans,” *The Bookman* 46 (November 1917): 261–2. The Act II Prelude (an orchestral development of material first heard in the “Barbaric Dance”) was included along with the Entrance of Montezuma and the Act III Prelude, in an orchestral suite from *Azora* arranged by one H. Schmid and published by Schirmer. See Paul P. Berthoud, *The Musical Works of Dr. Henry Hadley* (New York: Henry Hadley Foundation, 1942), 33.

Figure 5.2: Cover of *Azora*, piano-vocal score (1917)



Cadman, among the six composers in this group, was the one most closely associated with the Indianist compositional movement. Yet in the “Foreword” to the published score of *Shanewis*, Cadman issued this disclaimer:

The composer does not call this an *Indian* opera. In the first place, the story and libretto bear upon a phase of present-day American life with the Indian in transition. ... [S]ince more than three-fourths of the actual composition of the work lies within the boundaries of original creative effort ... there is no reason why this work should be labeled an Indian opera. Let it be an opera upon an American subject or if you will—an American opera!³⁵

That being said, Cadman still chose “to acknowledge the courtesy of those ethnologists and Indian folksong investigators who have so kindly allowed their gleanings of primitive vocal utterance to be used and idealized in this score.” Specifically, he named Fletcher, La Flesche, Densmore, Curtis, and Burton, whose research provided “themes in their entirety, partial themes or fragmentary themes which were suggestive of color and form and afforded many a rhythmic and melodic foundation for certain episodes.”³⁶ In *Shanewis*, Cadman attempts to take his method of “idealization” in an entirely new direction. Rather than being the sole intent and purpose of a work, as in his *Four American Indian Songs* or in the piano cycle *Idealized Indian Themes*, numbers based on Indian melodies now become just one of many elements within an inclusively American compositional style.³⁷ Pieces that in another context would have been isolated miniatures are now incorporated into a much larger, through-composed form. Indeed, the opera contains three of the composer’s finest examples of idealized Indian themes to be found anywhere in his output.

³⁵ Charles Wakefield Cadman, “Foreword” to *The Robin Woman (Shanewis): An American Opera* (Boston: White-Smith Music Publishing Co., 1918), 3.

³⁶ Ibid. As early as 1914, Arthur Elson detected a liability in the fact that “the average Eastern musician has to take his Indian melodies from a book.” Because so few people have heard it performed live in a tribal setting, Elson worried that “the average man will not recognize Indian music when he hears it. ... [In much Indianist composition] we do not recognize its Indian qualities unless we are told about them.” See Hughes and Elson, *American Composers*, 510–2.

³⁷ Boston’s White-Smith Music Co. published these sets in 1909 as op. 45 and in 1912 as op. 54, respectively.

Part One takes place at an evening soiree at which “Shanewis, the Indian maiden, will sing this evening; her first appearance as cantatrice”—so the chorus reports. Her performance pieces—“The Spring Song of the Robin Woman” (ex. 5.16a) and the requested encore, “Ojibway Canoe Song” (ex. 5.16b)—are perfect models of Cadman’s vision for idealization. Shanewis sings with onstage piano accompaniment, just as the real-life Tsianina and Cadman would have performed together many times, along with subtle additions from the orchestra in the pit. Later in the work, the “Intermezzo” between the opera’s two parts offers a fully-orchestrated illustration of the idealization method in action (ex. 5.16c).³⁸

Allegretto giocoso
(Like an incantation)

SHANEWIS
Oh, ye birds of spring, Come from your hid ing;

Orchestra

Piano on stage
mp *simile*

S.
Rob - ins all and hum - ing birds, Come un - to this bar - ren land.

Orch.

Pno.

Ex. 5.16a: Cadman, *Shanewis*, “Spring Song of the Robin Woman” (p. 27)

³⁸ Cadman himself identifies the source of the “Ojibway Canoe Song” in a footnote in the published score: “This song is by Frederick Burton, and the original Ojibway Indian theme and translated words have been further idealized and re-harmonized by Cadman.” John Tasker Howard provides further details: the “Spring Song” is a Cheyenne melody recorded by Natalie Curtis, while the “Intermezzo” uses an Omaha song collected by Alice Fletcher. See John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music: Three Hundred Years of It* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1931), 446.

SHANEWIS

Out on the lake my ca-noe is glid - ing, Pad-dle dip - ping soft lest she should

Allegretto giocoso

take a - larm, Ah, hey-ah hey - ah, ho, hey-ah hey - ah, ho, Thus I go!

a tempo

Ex. 5.16b: Cadman, *Shanewis*, “Ojibway Canoe Song” (p. 34)

Allegro capriccioso

f *p*

mp

Ex. 5.16c: Cadman, *Shanewis*, Intermezzo (p. 69)

The omnipresent tom-tom rhythm accompanies the “Spring Song” while the falling phrase endings suggest the melody’s Indian provenance. The “Canoe Song” adopts a barcarolle-type compound meter, but the melody’s vocable-based second half, with what should be by now an expected descending contour, could only come from an Indian source. However, here Cadman

is careful to underplay the exotic “otherness” of Indian music. “Idealization” instead focuses on a synthesis of Indian melodies and art music accompaniment. This accessible style combined with the upbeat character of these songs and the Intermezzo—in stark contrast to the generally somber mood and minor mode of the Indian music examples encountered earlier in this chapter—surely contributed much to the popularity of Cadman’s score.

This Intermezzo serves a particularly important role in shaping the structure of the entire opera. At the local level, it divides the work’s two halves and prepares the audience for the colorful powwow which begins the second part. On a larger scale, it occupies the opposite end of the emotional spectrum from where the opera ultimately ends—with the sudden, unexpected murder of Lionel. The opera begins with a similar emotional contrast, as the *New York Times* critic who reviewed the premiere observed:

Mr. Cadman’s overture [was] in sharp contrast with much that was to follow; a tragic overture to a merry scene, as surely as his opera’s later intermezzo was light and gay by way of prelude to a swift, somber culmination. The double contrast was intentional, it was clever, and it worked like yeast in the dough.³⁹

Cadman scholar Harry Perison, on the other hand, felt that the composer could only “create a large form through a concatenation of smaller forms” and found that the opera “failed to survive in the repertory because of its inherent [formal] weaknesses.”⁴⁰ He seems particularly disturbed by the work’s incorporation of closed forms, as in the three “idealizations” discussed above, but somehow overlooked the fact that this practice is comparable to what Cadman’s Italian contemporaries did in their veristic works—for instance, Turiddu’s Serenade and the Intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

³⁹ “*Shanewis*, Indian Opera, Captivates,” *New York Times*, 24 March 1918.

⁴⁰ Harry D. Perison, “Charles Wakefield Cadman: His Life and Works” (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1978), 197.

Taken together, these three excerpts provide Cadman's definitive demonstration of the idealization technique, superseding his earlier efforts in song form and for solo piano. The composer explained:

The best results have been obtained, first, through an orchestral medium, the song form next, and after that by choral treatment. It may be that the native quality, the mood or the picture conveyed in subjective musical expression of the Indian, is more easily transmuted and made objective, as it were, through the orchestral palette.⁴¹

What marks Cadman's examples as more successful than those from the other composers examined here is his ability to meld his borrowed melodic material into a distinctive compositional language all his own. Michael Pisani, for instance, recognized that "Cadman's home-grown ... musical language seemed more representative of an American sensibility than almost any operatic venture written in the generation or two before him."⁴² The opera's early critics regularly complimented precisely these passages. Frederic Dean felt that Cadman's chosen Indian themes "give just such atmosphere as the story needs. ... It is a glimpse of Indian life made vocal by the added charm of Indian music—*real* Indian music, music that is vital, fervid, sweet, passionate, tragic" (emphasis original)⁴³ John Porte praised the "melodic charm that is rather appealing" and "that slight melancholy, far-away touch that seems to pervade all modern references to the history of the North American Indian."⁴⁴ Edward Hipsher wrote in especially glowing terms: "and here we come upon the gem of ray serene. For this music is characteristic, logical and extremely beautiful. The orchestral score flows smoothly, and yet

⁴¹ Earlier in the same passage and apparently critiquing his own work, Cadman noted that Indian "themes do not lend themselves successfully to piano music, and little success has been achieved in this direction." Cadman, "The 'Idealization' of Indian Music," 390–1.

⁴² Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music*, 274.

⁴³ Dean, "The Opera," 262.

⁴⁴ John F. Porte, "Charles Wakefield Cadman: An American Nationalist," *The Chesterian* 5, no.39 (1924): 225.

constantly shimmers with Indian color.”⁴⁵ Even Giulio Gatti-Cassaza, not always one to praise the American works he presented at the Met, agreed that “Cadman revealed himself as a composer of unmistakable lyric gifts.”⁴⁶

When Tsianina included the two idealized songs in her recitals, the critical response was especially positive. Edwin Schallert, critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, enthused that she “brings ... a rich atmosphere of idealized primitive feeling and manifests a deep sincerity in their rendition.”⁴⁷ Even Indians themselves responded positively to Cadman’s settings. In her autobiography, Tsianina recalled one performance in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at which many Pueblo Indians were in attendance: “It was revealing to observe how they received Mr. Cadman’s music.... They nodded their heads approvingly after each number. ... The people gratified his heart because they loved and felt the sincerity of this adopted brother.”⁴⁸ Their welcome was especially warm because Cadman had recently become a tribal blood brother in a pipe ceremony led by Shooting Star, the great-grandson of Chief Sitting Bull.

Yet despite this consistently complimentary critical tone, Cadman’s “idealized” numbers raise questions more complicated than their immediacy of appeal might imply. Whereas his colleagues used their Indian material to set apart an exotic other, Cadman strove to integrate his borrowed melodies within the overall musical fabric. This was the composer’s stated intent, as he explained in a *Los Angeles Times* interview: “I have used about twenty Indian themes in the opera, but have instrumented them along the best lines of orchestral usage, with no attempt to

⁴⁵ Hipsher, *American Opera*, 107.

⁴⁶ Giulio Gatti-Casazza, *Memories of the Opera* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 240.

⁴⁷ Edwin Schallert, “Indian Songs Please Throng,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 January 1923.

⁴⁸ Tsianina Blackstone, *Where Trails Have Led Me*, 2nd ed. (Santa Fe, N.M.: Vergara Printing, 1970), 34–40.

appear bizarre or eccentric.”⁴⁹ Yes, Cadman’s method of idealization does synthesize the Indian and art music soundworlds, but a closer reading of Shanewis’s performance scene suggests that this operatically trained Indian character is not as assimilated as her music might make her seem. Mrs. Everton informs her guests that Shanewis “is a native forest bird, born of our mighty wilderness ... taught by ... a strange, primeval song of ancient intervals. ... Her song will transport you to forest solitudes, to prairie uplands, to mountain wilderness.” Shanewis herself explains that she owes her operatic abilities to her “benefactress. She took the wild bird from its forest home and changed its sylvan notes to lyric airs. All that I am she made me, all that I do she taught me.”⁵⁰ Both comments distance the character from the style of music she performs. Her songs “transport” the listeners away from their present surroundings, just as Shanewis recognizes how her singing has been “changed” and “taught,” and therefore is explicitly *not* her natural mode of performance. In this scene, Shanewis is on display, dressed in traditional Indian garb, and performing for an Anglo audience that mirrored the attendees in the opera house. Her separateness is made clear through the visual and textual aspects of this scene, even as Cadman’s musical style attempts to downplay this separation through aural synthesis.

Only once in the score does Cadman seek to recreate Indian music in an intentionally “authentic” fashion. During the powwow scene which opens Part Two, the gathered Indians first sing an idealized, repetitive, nature-oriented chorus for the white spectators (ex. 5.17a). At the conclusion of their singing, Lionel assumes that the powwow is over, but Shanewis stops him, saying, “No, there’s one more song!” Cadman here presents as close to an un-idealized Indian song as transcription into the operatic medium could allow (ex. 5.17b). Absent are the melodic

⁴⁹ Jeanne Redman, “Cadman Talks About Opera *Shanewis*,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 November 1918.

⁵⁰ Mrs. Everton’s lines appear on pages 16–17 and 22 of the piano-vocal score, Shanewis’s text on 38–39.

and rhythmic alterations, text translation, and harmonization that mark Cadman's other settings of Indian melodies in *Shanewis*. Instead, he chooses to allow the Indian's music to speak for itself.⁵¹

Ex. 5.17a: Cadman, *Shanewis*, “idealized” powwow chorus (p. 76)

Ex. 5.17b: Cadman, *Shanewis*, “authentic” powwow song (p. 99)

This shift in musical tone marks a significant turning point in the opera's plot. Only now do Lionel and Shanewis finally begin to confront the problems brought about by their cultural and ethnic differences. The antagonist, Philip Harjo, makes his first appearance following this scene,

⁵¹ A footnote in the score explains, “This is an Osage Indian ceremonial song and is used by permission of the U. S. Bureau of American Ethnology.” Kris Bjerke's description of this scene focuses on the duality of the “idealistic” and “realistic” musics. See “Perspectives of the Operas of Charles Wakefield Cadman” (M.M. thesis, Bowling Green University, 1992), 60.

while Amy and Mrs. Everton finally catch up with the missing Lionel soon thereafter. Thus, “real” Indian music is the trigger that speeds the plot towards its tragic conclusion.

Cadman’s “authentic” transcription imparts a musical change upon Shanewis too. Her previous Indian melodies had all been mediated through idealization, constrained by the social and emotional limitations of the parlor ballad or the recital song. In her great monologue, however, often referred to as “Into the Forest Near to God I Go,” Cadman and Eberhart (and Tsianina too?) are free to express their own point of view on centuries of Indian mistreatment (ex. 5.18). A gapped melody and descending contour remain, but the emotions expressed in the text are far removed from the romanticized nature imagery of the earlier songs. Beth Levy explains, “Like a mirror image of the Caucasian singer Sophie Braslau who sang the title role in elaborate buckskin costume, Shanewis’s monologue presents its ‘exotic’ elements in distinctly Italianate garb.”⁵² This scene was especially powerful when performed by Tsianina herself in later revivals. One critic recalled, “who, having heard Tsianina ... can ever forget this formidable arraignment of the pale-face civilization. Tsianina lived and suffered in every note. ... [She] has lived the age-old anguish, felt the fierce indictment, and so made her hearers live and feel the same emotion.”⁵³ Absent now are the tensions between synthesis and distancing that resulted from “idealization.” As audiences clearly recognized, here Shanewis communicates more honestly and powerfully than anywhere else in the opera.

⁵² Beth Ellen Levy, “‘In the Glory of the Sunset’: Arthur Farwell, Charles Wakefield Cadman, and Indianism in American Music” *repercussions* 5 (March 1996): 173.

⁵³ Quoted without full bibliographical details in Blackstone, *Where Trails Have Led Me*, 115. Tsianina only gives the critic’s last name, Bishop. For an additional analysis of this scene, see James Parakilas, “The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter,” *Opera Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1994): 64.

SHANEWIS

For half a thou-sand years Your race has cheat-ed mine With sweet words and no-ble sen - ti-ments,

Andante amarissimamente

mp

Of-fer-ing friend-ship, knowl - edge, pro - tec-tion. With one hand you gave

più mosso

nig-gard-ly, With the oth-er took a - way greed-i - ly!

accel.

Ex. 5.18: Cadman, Shanewis, “Into the Forest Near to God I Go” (p. 116-7)

While the early commentators were generally impressed with the overall use of Indian materials in these operas, by the mid-1920s, the critical tide had started to turn against this musical source in general. Already in 1926, only eight years after the premiere of *Shanewis*, Olin Downes complained in the *New York Times* that the opera “was sugar-cured Indian in expression, sentimental, saccharine, [and] lacking in true emotional intensity” even as Cadman’s Italian models continued to hold the stage.⁵⁴ Clearly, as musical tastes shifted towards a more

⁵⁴ Olin Downes, “A Twelfth ‘American Opera,’” *New York Times*, 17 October 1926.

modernist American expression, the type of Indianism encountered throughout these excerpts quickly began to sound passé. Deems Taylor, an opera composer of the subsequent generation, would never have even considered including Indians in one of his stage works. Exemplifying a changing perception of the nationalist credentials of Indian materials, he asked the obvious question:

[W]herein are they particular American? That is, wherein do they express anything of *us*? Just what response is going to be stirred in the blood of a New Yorker of mixed Russian, Italian, and Irish extraction, or a Chicagoan whose forebears were Swedish, Czechoslovak, and German, when he hears a Zuni medicine song, or an Apache war dance? We have stolen everything else from the Indian that he ever owned; we might at least let him have his own music for himself.⁵⁵

By 1955, Gilbert Chase described the entire Indianist movement as “a transitory phase” in which composers “were looking for something indigenous ... that could immediately and unmistakably be indentified as ‘American.’” In Chase’s opinion, the movement faded because “Indian tribal music was not part of the main stream of American culture.” He ultimately dismissed the trend as “an interesting but essentially exotic ... digression, a diversion from the European heritage.”⁵⁶ Certainly, by mid-century this musical style was more at home in the lower-brow world of cinema than in Grand Opera or art music composition, yet already Chase had lost touch with the original cultural context and artistic intent of these composers. Indian musics were not *the* sole source of nationalism, but simply one part of an operatic soundworld that would establish their works as distinctively American. This was no mere “digression” or “diversion” away from the “European heritage,” rather it was an attempt to prove that American composers could inject their own indigenous contribution into this shared, inherited tradition.

⁵⁵ Deems Taylor, *Of Men and Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), 124.

⁵⁶ Gilbert Chase, *America’s Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, 1st ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), 400–1.

Music for Some Other “Others”

While Indian music serves to define these operas as distinctively New World in origin, the musics of other ethnic groups function to expand the variety of local color. In *Narcissa*, for example, Moore includes a French-language barcarolle sung by a group of offstage boatmen (ex. 5.19). The melody and text both come from a familiar French folk song (related to “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow”). Paul Hedrick’s observation, that “the music is free and flowing, written for the greater part in simple but none the less appealing style,” seems an especially apt if rather vague characterization.⁵⁷

The musical score is for a barcarolle from the opera *Narcissa*. It is titled "BOATMEN (3 Baritones)" and is in 6/8 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal melody for the three baritones and the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Mal-brough s'en va't 'en quer - re, Ne sait quand re - vien -". The piano accompaniment begins with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic. The second system continues the melody and accompaniment. The lyrics are: "dra! Ne sait que re - vien - dra, Ne sait que re - vien - dra". The piano accompaniment includes a *pp* dynamic in the middle and a *p* (piano) dynamic at the end. The score is written for three baritone voices and piano.

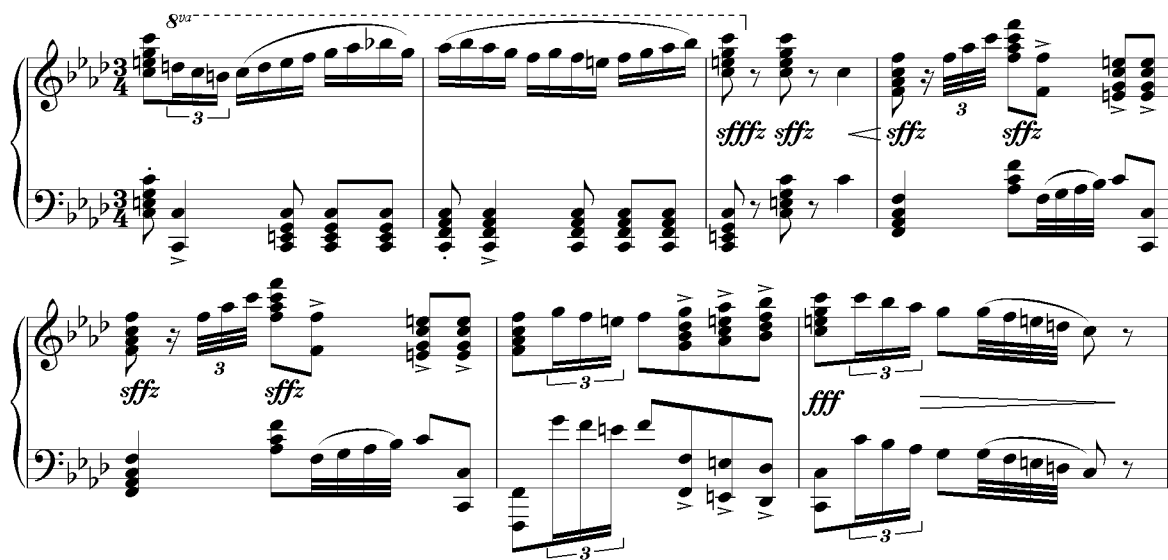
Ex. 5.19: Moore, *Narcissa*, Barcarolle (p. 65-6)

While the entire passage lasts only 23 measures, it accomplishes more than just “coloring” Moore’s stage version of a frontier Fort Vancouver. One of the opera’s underlying themes is the historical importance of securing this territory as a U. S. possession, a task in which Marcus

⁵⁷ Hedrick, “*Narcissa* Approved,” *Seattle Daily Times*, 23 April 1912.

Whitman played a central role. This brief barcarolle and the passing appearance of French-Canadian fur traders illustrate just how many competing groups held an interest in this land.

Hispanic color in both *The Sacrifice* and *Natoma* helps to localize their southwestern settings. Yet despite the fact that half of the characters in *The Sacrifice* are Mexican, Converse only explicitly develops this musical ingredient during the first portion of the second act. Achieving a musical contrast appears to be his principal aim, for the scene does not involve the Mexican opponents of the American soldiers, but rather presents a group of gypsies who come to entertain the Americans at their base. These gypsies dance for the soldiers and sing a chorus, offering a diversion that in no way advances the opera's plot (ex. 5.20a and b).



Ex. 5.20a: Converse, *The Sacrifice*, Gypsy dance (p. 124)

GYPSIES

Head and heart are light As dan-cing feet In ai-ry

flight To mu-sic sweet, to mu-sic sweet.

Ex. 5.20b: Converse, *The Sacrifice*, Gypsy chorus (p. 125-6)

In addition to linking *The Sacrifice* to a long line of gypsy-themed 19th-century European operas, musical variety seems to be Converse's primary objective here, for the tonal stability and melodiousness of his material stand in stark contrast to the complex chromaticism of the surroundings. Thankfully, this Spanish foray also contributes one of the opera's most charming numbers (ex. 5.21). Just prior to the arrival of the gypsies, a character named Magdalena comes to give flowers to the soldiers and flirt with the men. Her character is apparently half-Mexican, half-Indian; her sung text, more than the music, reveals as much. She calls the soldiers "Caballero" when she first arrives, but her song mentions the "Great Spirit" before shifting towards rather generic romantic imagery. The melodic simplicity, straightforward functional

harmonies, and memorable tunefulness—closer to the language of operetta than grand opera—set the number apart from anything else in Converse’s score. This so-called “Flower Girl Song” must have left an impression on the audience too, for the *Boston Globe* reviewer specifically included it among the “pages which one will probably remember.”⁵⁸

MAGDELENA

To ev - 'ry man a mai - den, To ev - 'ry maid a man;

So our great Spi-rit made us, When Earth and life be-gan.

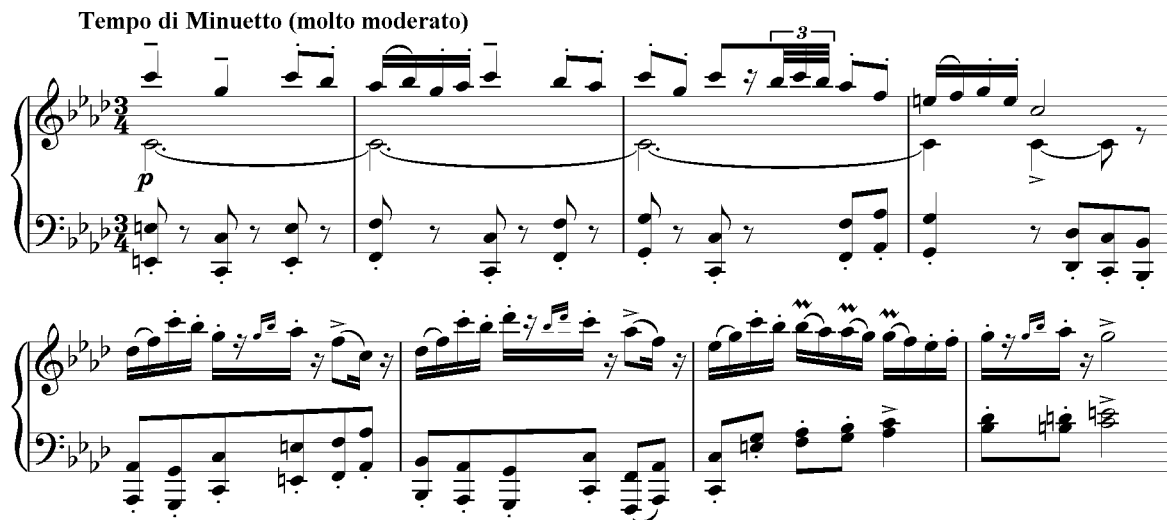
poco rallent.

Ex. 5.21: Converse, *The Sacrifice*, Magdalena’s “Flower Girl Song” (p. 114)

The Spanish element receives a much more elaborate development in Herbert’s *Natoma*. As in *The Sacrifice*, these numbers occur during the opera’s central-act fiesta scene, given under the auspices of Don Francisco to celebrate his daughter’s coming of age. The Spaniards of the ruling class first dance a formal Minuet (ex. 5.22a) which then segues into a more colorfully exotic Pañuelo (ex. 5.22b). Both dances feature stereotypical Spanish rhythmic figuration and melodic ornamentation. The fast triplet figure seems to be a consistent signifier of Spanishness in

⁵⁸ “Critical Review of the Opera’s Music and Story,” *Boston Globe*, 4 March 1911.

this context. This trait appears in both of Converse’s gypsy numbers and in all of Herbert’s Spanish music, but can also be found in Bizet’s “Seguidilla” from *Carmen*. Herbert heightens the exotic tension in the Pañuelo through an unusual juxtaposition of the tonic with its major mediant, a harmonic move repeated throughout the dance. (Note that immediately after these dances, Castro issues the challenge for someone to join him in the Dagger Dance—discussed above.) Earlier in the act is Herbert’s most distinctively Spanish vocal number, the “Vaqueros’ Song,” an effective moment for an otherwise minor character, Pico (ex. 5.22c). Although it opens with an unusual introduction that alternates duple- and triple-time measures, the song’s chorus settles down into Herbert’s most ingratiating operetta style. (Perhaps Converse had something like this in mind when he composed Magdalena’s “Flower Girl Song.”) This cheerful melody mixes a characteristically American cakewalk rhythm with a habanera-type accompaniment and once again includes the triplet turn melodic ornament. Herbert himself pointed out that, as with the opera’s Indian music, “There is Spanish coloring, but I have taken no special Spanish theme to start with.”⁵⁹



Ex. 5.22a: Herbert, *Natoma*, Minuet (p. 271)

⁵⁹ Interview in “Victor Herbert’s First Serious Opera,” *New York Times*, 10 October 1910.

Tempo di Pañuelo

Two systems of piano music in 3/4 time. The first system consists of two measures, each with a treble and bass staff. The first measure has a forte piano (fp) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. The second measure has a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. The second system also consists of two measures. The first measure has a forte (f) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. The second measure has a piano (p) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. The bass staff in both systems features a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Ex. 5.22b: Herbert, *Natoma*, Pañuelo (p. 273)

Two systems of musical score for a song. The first system includes a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 2/4 time and features a melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are: "Va - que - ros, dev - ils to dare! Va - que - ros, nev - er a care!". The piano accompaniment is in 2/4 time and features a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system also includes a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line continues the melody with the lyrics: "Va - que - ros, read - y to fling Our glove in the ring, mis a - mi - gos!". The piano accompaniment continues the steady eighth-note accompaniment. The score includes tempo markings: "rit." (ritardando) and "a tempo".

Ex. 5.22c: Herbert, *Natoma*, "Vaqueros' Song" (p. 205-6)

These Spanish-tinged numbers were among the most warmly received by the opera's first critics. In comparison to the Indian portions of the score, one writer found the "Spanish half of Mr. Herbert's Spanish-American local color [to be] more unmistakable, and, on the whole, more successful. [These passages] are written in excellent Spanish, and it was significant how immediate was their appeal to the audience."⁶⁰ Arthur Elson felt that these numbers offered "examples of Bizet-like strength."⁶¹ Glenn Dillard Gunn drew an even bolder comparison, claiming that the "ragtime ecstasy of the vaqueros is far more realistic than Puccini's feeble efforts at syncopation in *The Girl of the Golden West*."⁶² It requires but little effort to sense the hyperbolic exaggeration of these claims. Despite the justifiable popularity of these numbers with audiences, this critical stance seems to be a rather transparent attempt to establish an Americanist priority for Herbert's opera, ahead of both his foreign contemporaries and repertoire staples.

While one can hardly concur with an opinion that would rate Herbert's operetta-like directness ahead of Puccini's most subtle and experimental score, even more surprising is the change in reception when the opera played on the West coast. Herbert's music for his imagined Californios was apparently much less convincing when the audience knew the real thing at first hand. The opinion of Hector Alliot, a critic reviewing the opera's 1913 Los Angeles premiere, could not be more different. Instead of praising this music as some of Herbert's best, Alliot complained that "the second act is unfortunate." He of course agreed that the music "should be here Spanish" but instead found it to be merely "Herbertesque, with a little Puccini paprika and a dash of Strauss pimiento." He noted that true Spanish music should be "slow, graceful,

⁶⁰ "Natoma Greeted By Great Audience," *New York Times*, 1 March 1911.

⁶¹ Hughes and Elson, *American Composers*, 465.

⁶² Gunn, "Herbert's Opera, *Natoma*," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 December 1911. William Chase echoed the opinion more than two decades later, suggesting that *Natoma* was "a more forward-looking piece" than Puccini's *Fanciulla*. See William B. Chase, "15th Native Opera in Gatti's Regime," *New York Times*, 11 February 1934.

somewhat melancholic,” but instead Herbert allowed “the brasses [to] crash every once in a while with violence foreign to aboriginal, Spanish or modern California.” Even the dancing drew his ire, sarcastically calling it a “‘faux pas de dance’ ... foreign to the time and conditions.” He could only conclude: “it is a pity that the composer did not inspire himself of the local musical color he seems never to have understood.”⁶³ Alliot’s review offers a rare and remarkable glimpse into the regional differences of opinion that could have greeted any of these operas. But even if Californians might have found Herbert’s musical portrayal of their heritage objectionable, it was after all only one aspect of a multifaceted score. As the headline to this review declares, the production of *Natoma* in Los Angeles was nevertheless “a triumph.”

Music for American Characters

After the stylistic diversity of the excerpts discussed above, it might come as something of a surprise to find that the music for American characters seems designed to demonstrate alignment with operatic expectations rather than to establish American uniqueness. While later generations of critics and historians have found fault with these works for this very reason, another explanation, rooted in the context of the time, is far more plausible. Given that one goal of these composers was to prove that they too could create operas worthy of the European canon, then what better way to make it seem normal to find American characters on the operatic stage than by assigning them music in a style compatible with that of the European competition. “Indian music” could contribute the requisite nationalistic traits, while “American music” would reveal an acceptance of inherited, cosmopolitan trends and traditions.

⁶³ Hector Alliot, “Native Composition: *Natoma* Opera a Triumph,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 March 1913.

Music for the heroic male characters of Paul in *Natoma* and Xalca in *Azora* (a symbolic representative) illustrates this approach. Both are military officers and characters whom the audience is expected to admire. Whereas Indian and Spanish signifiers are intentionally obvious to the listener, one searches in vain for a specifically American sound in these passages. In Paul’s “Ode to Columbus” from *Natoma*, Herbert allows his tenor ample opportunity to display his high notes, while brassy fanfare figures leave no doubt about the character’s personal valor (ex. 5.23a). Paul’s leitmotif accompanies much of the introductory recitative (not given here) and reappears in the orchestra following the aria’s final vocal note (boxed in the ex. 5.23b below). Throughout the number, it is the text—as previously discussed in chapter 3—and not the music that makes the character’s American nationality apparent.

PAUL

No coun-try can my own out - vie In tri-bute to the one Who held the flag of Spain on high Toward the set-ting sun.

Ex. 5.23a: Herbert, *Natoma*, Paul’s “Ode to Columbus” (p. 264)

Co-lum - bia! we pledge our love to thee!

molto pesante

sffz

sffz

ff tutta forza

Ex. 5.23b: Herbert, *Natoma*, Paul's "Ode to Columbus" (p. 268)

Similar musical traits characterize an aria in *Azora* for Xalca, that opera's hero, in which he pledges himself to Montezuma's service and promises to return victorious from battle (ex. 5.24). His sense of duty, honor, and valor are the motivating factors here, along with his love for Azora. The music supports this view with its soaring vocal line and bombastic orchestral underpinning. The driving, linear bass line boldly reflects the tenor's heroism, channeling the music towards the climactic high A in the vocal line. Clearly, Hadley intends that the audience should see in Xalca a sort of proto-American, one who holds American values long before this nation was established. The complete absence of musical exoticism here identifies him as "one of us"—that is, one who could be included among the predominantly white, upper-class opera audience—rather than as an outsider or "other." What is most notable in these excerpts is the generalized "normalness" of the musical style, rather than any degree of national specificity. Yes, the music is compositionally distinctive—for both arias surely reward the efforts of any tenor portraying these roles—but just not in a way that evokes a specifically American soundworld.

XALCA

With tal - ons spread my Ea-gles fly! Their might - y

wings in fu - rious wrath Shall beat up on the foe, And strife shall rage and shall not cease Till

o're the field there shines the Star of Vic - to - ry!

Ex. 5.24: Hadley, *Azora*, aria for Xalca (p. 80-1)

Converse pursued a similar approach with his music for Burton in *The Sacrifice*.

Uniquely, in the critical commentary surrounding this work, some observers specifically noted that Converse's score fits in with operatic tradition. Olin Downes, for example, observed that "the composer has endeavored in this work to follow operatic customs," while Louis Elson claimed that "*The Sacrifice* is what it pretends to be, a Grand Opera, and not an attempt to deck

out this form with the graces and ornaments of the Opera Comique.”⁶⁴ Herbert, likewise, understood that one did not necessarily need to Americanize the soundworld of music for American characters. He explained:

An American atmosphere is not obtained by pepper-casting the score with themes from patriotic songs. Puccini, in *Madama Butterfly*, makes use of “The Star Spangled Banner,” for instance, and also of a few Japanese harmonies. Does that make his opera American, Japanese, or even a mixture of both?⁶⁵

Herbert seems to suggest, in the quotation and in the excerpts above, that signification by quotation is not necessary for American characters. This view offers a stark contrast to how composers treated their music for Indian roles. American characters are positioned comfortably within the well-established operatic tradition, while Indians receive specific characterization through borrowed melodies and stereotyped musical traits that functions to set them apart.

A singularly contrasting example of music for an Anglo-American protagonist forms the principal highlight of Moore’s *Narcissa*. The title role’s aria “Royal Soul,” like the previous excerpts for military men, acts as a vehicle to display the character’s personal heroism, pride, and determination (ex. 5.25). Yet if the previous excerpts present a musical “normalness,” Moore here sets out on a strikingly different course. With the rare tempo indication of “Entusiasmo” and irregular meter of 10/8, *Narcissa* tries to convince Marcus of her readiness to become his wife and join him on his westward mission. Even if the musical style, with its rolling arpeggio accompaniment, is only one step removed from the parlor ballad, the unexpected meter and earnestness of the sung text demonstrate a grander, more operatic aspiration. Paul Hedrick, reviewing the premiere, commended this passage above any other, writing that “here Mrs. Moore

⁶⁴ Olin Downes writing in *Musical America*, March 1911, and Louis C. Elson from the *Boston Transcript*, 4 March 1911, both quoted in Ruth Severance, “The Life and Work of Frederick Shepherd Converse” (M.A. thesis, Boston University, 1932), 55–6.

⁶⁵ Herbert quoted in Joseph Kaye, *Victor Herbert: The Biography of America’s Greatest Composer of Romantic Music* (New York: G.H. Watt, 1931), 213.

has done her best work—there can be no dispute as to this, nor can there be any doubt whatever that [in “Royal Soul”] the composer has established a creative ability which will be recognized by musical authorities wherever it is heard.” The audience apparently concurred, for immediately following this number, as Hedrick reports, “the fate of the premiere of *Narcissa* was settled. Mrs. Moore had won and won completely. There was never a doubt from that moment as to the success of the production.”⁶⁶

NARCISSA

Entusiasmo

Roy - al soul, Love of my heart, Think thou my head can
rest on soft est couch of down, When might - y ter - rors,
com - pass thee a - round thy sad - dle - pil - low'd head?

Ex. 5.25: Moore, *Narcissa*, “Royal Soul” (p. 32)

⁶⁶ Hedrick, “*Narcissa* Approved,” *Seattle Daily Times*, 23 April 1912. This number is an excellent example of what Carl Presley observed was the opera’s strength: “The score is rich in free, spontaneous melody, given excellent treatment and at no time forced.” See Carl Presley, “Historical Opera of the Northwest,” *Musical America* (11 May 1912): 5. For a further analysis, focused on a feminist reading of this excerpt, see Callahan, “Moore’s *Narcissa*,” 113–9. Callahan suggests that “the *Narcissa* Moore created is a reflection of her own ideal woman” (105).

Turning next to ensemble music, two analogous choruses from the close chronological pair of *Natoma* and *The Sacrifice* provide particularly compelling examples of music composed for Anglo characters. These numbers give musical voice to the common, everyday American as an enlisted sailor or soldier in either the Navy or Army respectively. Herbert's sailors sing as they disembark from their ship and make their entrance on stage (ex. 5.26). Converse's soldiers perform a two-verse strophic song in which the chorus completes the stanzas begun by a solo voice (only the choral entrance appears in ex. 5.27).

CHORUS OF SAILORS

Blow, Bo re-as, blow! Old Nep tune, shake your locks! Blow, Bo re-as, blow! blow!

Ex. 5.26: Herbert, *Natoma*, Sailors' chorus (p. 259)

MALE CHORUS (Soldiers)

True love, fair love, Fight-ing for home and my dear love!
Wait - ing, wait - ing, Wait-ing to wel-come your lov - er?

Ex. 5.27: Converse, *The Sacrifice*, Soldiers' chorus (p. 99)

Both numbers straddle a curious stylistic divide. On the one hand, soldiers' or sailors' choruses are among the most traditional of operatic stock set piece types. The first audiences would surely have been familiar with similar passages in works as diverse as Gounod's *Faust*, Verdi's *Il Traviatore*, Wagner's *Flying Dutchman*, or Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Herbert's own operettas include related numbers; "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp" from *Naughty Marietta* occupies a similar aesthetic. This material could relate to the *Männerchor* tradition, continued in the United States by untold numbers of German immigrants.⁶⁷ However, the close part writing and tight choral harmonies also suggest more specifically American sources: college glee clubs and the barbershop chorus. The closing cadence in the Herbert excerpt, in fact, alludes directly to standard barbershop harmonies, with the two descending parallel tritones in the upper voice parts. Again, this pre-familiar musical language serves to normalize the presence of American characters on the operatic stage, for what could be more natural than for a group of American men to join in singing a glee.

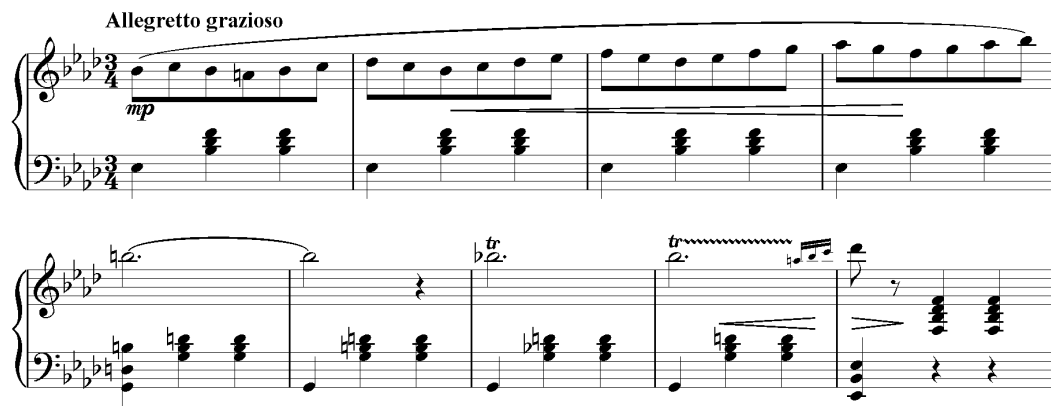
In Nevin's *Poia*, music of a distinctively Anglo-American style appears in one of the least expected places, the second act's "Ballet of the Four Seasons." Why this opera even has a lengthy, four-movement dance interpolation is unclear. Ostensibly, the personifications of the seasons are presenting "gifts of beauty, love and joy" to Poia, who is placed in an enchanted sleep while the sun god heals his scar. While Humperdinck's *Hansel und Gretel*, one of Nevin's models, does include danced instrumental passages, these are tightly woven into the unfolding plot and are unified within that opera's overall style. Nevin, on the other hand, offers an old-fashioned *divertissement*. Despite the plot interruption, these ballet numbers present Nevin with

⁶⁷ For two studies of this tradition in the United States, see Mary Sue Morrow, "Somewhere Between Beer and Wagner: The Cultural and Musical Impact of German Männerchöre in New York and New Orleans," 79–109; and Suzanne G. Snyder, "The Indianapolis Männerchor: Contributions to a New Musicality in Midwestern Life," 111–40; in *Music and Culture in America, 1861–1918*, ed. Michael Saffle (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

an opportunity to compose in his most personal, Americanist mode. Like his brother Ethelbert, Arthur published collections or cycles of quasi-programmatic miniatures for the piano. This approachable parlor style was a central part of the nation's musical scene around the turn of the century, with MacDowell's *Woodland Sketches* as perhaps the most familiar example of this genre. For his ballet, Nevin rather incongruously introduces music in this American parlor style. The numbers for Spring, Summer, and Autumn could just as well be orchestral versions of his piano character pieces. The principal melodies of these movements appear below (ex. 5.28).



Ex. 5.28a: Nevin, *Poia*, Ballet of the Four Seasons – Spring (p. 92)

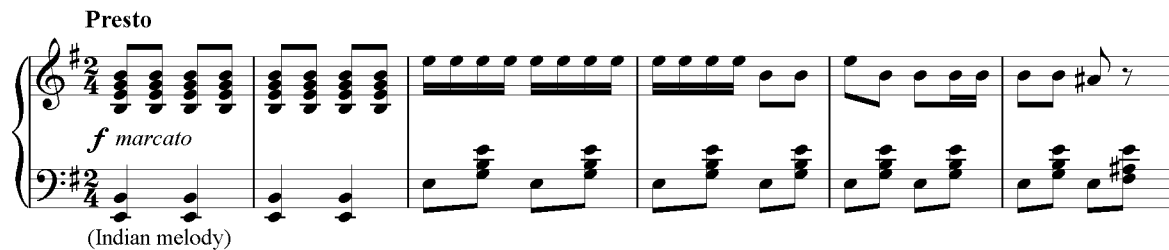


Ex. 5.28b: Nevin, *Poia*, Ballet of the Four Seasons – Summer (p. 94)

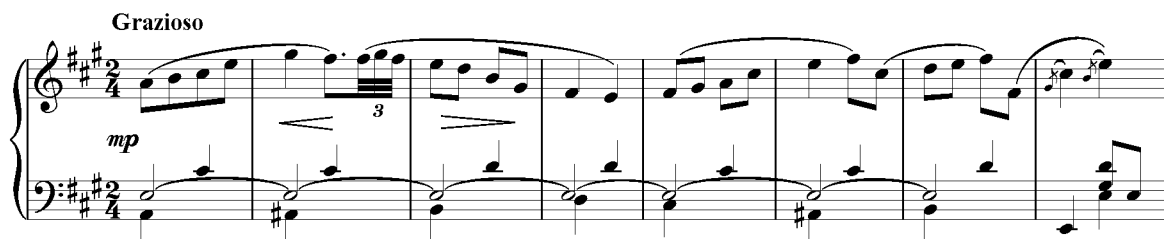


Ex. 5.28c: Nevin, *Poia*, Ballet of the Four Seasons – Autumn (p. 98)

In the dance for Winter, however, Nevin returns to his Indianist mode of writing. He concludes the ballet with another setting of a warlike, borrowed Indian theme (ex. 5.29a) but alternates it with a contrasting *grazioso* strain, again derived from his American parlor style (ex. 5.29b).



Ex. 5.29a: Nevin, *Poia*, Ballet of the Four Seasons – Winter (p. 100)



Ex. 5.29b: Nevin, *Poia*, Ballet of the Four Seasons – Winter (p. 101)

For an American audience, this style would have been as reassuringly familiar as the glee allusions found in the choruses discussed above. Just what the German audience at the Berlin premiere made of these numbers we can only speculate. However, the press reports that made it back overseas were overall not very positive. Julian Johnson, summarizing the view of the German critics for his readers in the *Los Angeles Times*, explained: “The music is said to be not bad, but commonplace, which is of necessity fatal, for that which is mediocre can never hope for the notice accorded either atrocity or greatness.”⁶⁸ This, however, was a second hand opinion. One J. MacD., after witnessing a 1914 lecture-demonstration of excerpts from the opera, was thoroughly convinced of the work’s merits. He called it “quite an exalted gem, being rich in

⁶⁸ Julian Johnson, “*Poia* Fails to Qualify,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May 1910.

melodic content, original, and withal something that we should know at first hand.”⁶⁹ One can only regret that American audiences never got that chance.

Music for Romantic Relationships

In several of these operas, the love interest of the American male protagonist comes from a different ethnic group. The ramifications of such potentially controversial interracial pairings have previously been examined in chapter three. However, these opera plots require that audiences be able to relate sympathetically to their female leads, characters that might otherwise be perceived as outsiders. This might have posed a challenging dramaturgical hurdle, given the period’s general antagonism towards interracial relationships of this type and the more specific negative attitudes towards Indianist composition held by some critics, but musical style again plays the deciding factor. Rather than emphasizing a character’s separateness, a composer can instead demonstrate that these women represent acceptable romantic partners by writing in a decidedly non-exotic idiom that matches the music for American males discussed above.

This is especially true of the music given to the Spanish maiden Barbara in *Natoma*. Her second-act “Spring Song” is a prime example of this phenomenon. Her romance with Paul was already kindled in the first act; *Natoma*, too, predicted that they would fall for each other. This love interest crosses both ethnic and class divisions, hence Alvarado’s attempt to kidnap Barbara in order to steal her away from Paul, during which he is killed by *Natoma*. Despite this undercurrent of ethnic complexity, Herbert’s music assures listeners that Barbara and Paul are an appropriately matched couple. Like the Sailor’s chorus discussed above, Barbara’s “Spring Song” is again closely tied to his lighter idiom (ex. 5.30). The tuneful melody and simple,

⁶⁹ J. MacB., “American Opera Her Topic: Mrs. Lamasure Gives Interesting Lecture on Arthur Nevin’s *Poia*,” *Washington Post*, 20 December 1914.

arpeggiated accompaniment might otherwise have found a perfect home within one of Herbert's operettas, were it not for the lengthy, recitative-like introduction that makes its operatic point-of-origin clear.⁷⁰ In his music for Barbara, Herbert forgoes any trace of Spanish color, even though her ethnic origin would allow it. Instead, since she shares a musical style with Paul, it becomes clear that he does not pair with an exotic other, but rather with one who is like him.⁷¹ Barbara is a typical soprano ingénue—a natural match for the American hero. Natoma, on the other hand, with her more heavily operatic vocal writing and regular Indianist coloring, is the obvious outsider.

BARBARA

I list the trill in gold - en throat Of yon - der bird on
 wing a - float, Bear - ing the mes - sage far and near,

Ex. 5.30: Herbert, *Natoma*, Barbara's "Spring Song" (p. 247)

As this Natoma-Barbara comparison suggests, the issue of genre is a much more significant one in Herbert's opera than in those of his colleagues. Olin Downes considered it a

⁷⁰ Another Glenn Dillard Gunn comparison, this one more reasonable: Barbara's "Spring Song" was "as good as Nedda's," in reference to the act one "Stridono lassù," from Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*. See Gunn, "Herbert's Opera, *Natoma*," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 December 1911.

⁷¹ Michael Pisani, referring to Herbert's music for his upper-class Spanish characters and for Paul, describes this as "the distinctly non-exotic 'Herbert norm.'" See Pisani, "Exotic Sounds in the Native Land," 429.

“brave attempt ... at music of the manner and proportions of grand opera” even if Herbert “remained essentially a composer of light music.”⁷² The critic for the periodical *Current Literature* went further, declaring that *Natoma* “does not rise to the dignity of grand opera.”⁷³ The composer’s most recent biographer, Neil Gould, noted that act two (which contains the numbers examined here for Paul, Barbara, and the sailors) presents “some of Herbert’s best operetta-style music.”⁷⁴ Surely, this accessibility had much to do with *Natoma*’s long success with the public, even if critics affected a dismissive tone because of it. Perhaps the most curious opinion comes from Mary Garden, the soprano who created the title role. She recognized that some people consider *Natoma* “‘the first American grand opera.’ So they said, but I myself considered it a very excellent light opera, nothing more.”⁷⁵ Why she felt the need to belittle Herbert’s results is especially unclear given that *Natoma* sings the least operetta-like music of any role in the work.

Converse and Hadley pursue a similar course in the music they assign to their non-American female protagonists, yet with strikingly different results. Hadley’s more generic compositional language could just as well characterize any soprano heroine in any situation of distress, while Converse’s more personal idiom forms a perfect match for both the dramatic scenario and the singer who portrayed the role. In *The Sacrifice*, Burton’s unrequited Mexican love interest, Chonita, could easily have been characterized as an enticing exotic, but once again, Converse avoids even the slightest hint of local color in the music for this character. “Chonita’s

⁷² Downes, “A Twelfth ‘American Opera,’” *New York Times*, 17 October 1926.

⁷³ “The Musical Value of Victor Herbert’s *Natoma*,” *Current Literature* 50 (1911): 430.

⁷⁴ Neil Gould, *Victor Herbert: A Theatrical Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 415. Charles Hamm’s observation that “any references to Indian musical materials were obscured by Herbert’s usual operetta language” seems wide of the mark. The composer was in fact quite careful to keep any operetta-type influences separate from his Indianist passages. See Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 446–7.

⁷⁵ Mary Garden and Louis Biancolli, *Mary Garden’s Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 235.

Prayer,” another one of the *Boston Globe* reviewer’s “pages which one will probably remember,” provides a clear example of the composer’s approach (ex. 5.31). His audience would have been familiar with similar prayer scenes from other works, including those sung by Desdemona in Verdi’s *Otello* and Elizabeth in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*. Converse’s music aligns audience sympathies with the character of Chonita, even though she is technically an outsider. His careful text declamation, subtle chromatic melodic inflections, and moving inner voices duly capture the supplicatory devotion of Chonita’s attitude. The harmonic and tonal motion is richly expressive throughout the aria. The tonic of D-flat major passes first through a chromatic mediant to A-flat, later modulates to G-flat, and temporarily resolves on the sub-mediant of B-flat, all within the span of the fourteen measures illustrated below. Such tonal instability mirrors Chonita’s uncertain emotional state, as she seeks clarity for how to handle what she believes to be the death of her beloved Bernal (actually, he was only wounded) and the unwanted advances of Burton. This number is undoubtedly one of the highlights not only of *The Sacrifice*, but of this group of operas as a whole. American soprano Alice Nielsen recognized just how lucky she was to be given the chance to create this role: “For my own part, if it had been written especially for me it could not have suited me better.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Both quoted in an interview, “Boston Tomorrow Hears New Opera,” *Boston Globe*, 2 March 1911.

CHONITA *p*

Al-migh-ty Fa - ther, look down on me, and grant me Thy pro-tec-tion.

Andante sostenuto e cantabile

pp

mf

Com - fort my sor - row. Teach me Thy mer - cy,

f *pp*

and show Thine in - fi - nite com - pas - sion and love,

f *mf* *pp* *ritard.*

Ex. 5.31: Converse, *The Sacrifice*, “Chonita’s Prayer” (p. 165-6)

Likewise, in *Azora* Hadley too characterizes his title heroine through the use of an expressly non-exotic idiom, even though she is nominally from an ancient South American tribe. Her act-three scena, often referred to by its opening text, “Now Fades the Opal Sky,” provides a characteristic illustration (ex. 5.32). Azora is anxiously awaiting the return of Xalca from battle and calling upon the gods to preserve his safety. Similar tonal motion to that found in “Chonita’s

Prayer” (above) reflects Azora’s emotional distress in this excerpt too. The excerpt begins in A-flat major, a tritone away from the tonic of D, but through an enharmonic respelling ($A\flat=G\sharp$) and a third-related harmonic shift ($A\flat M-EM$ in first inversion) the tonality easily returns to home territory. (Coincidentally, this identical third-related harmonic shift appeared at the beginning of “Chonita’s Prayer.”)

The image shows a musical score for a scene from the opera Azora. The title is "Now Fades the Opal Sky" (p. 107) by Hadley. The score is for a vocal part (AZORA) and piano accompaniment. The key signature is A-flat major (three flats) and the time signature is 8/8. The vocal line has lyrics: "And light his home-ward path. O Flame ev-er - liv - ing, burn thou for him, that hon-or and vic - to - ry may crown his val - iant brow. Oh,". The piano accompaniment includes markings for "Largamente", "f", "più mosso", and "cresc.".

Ex. 5.32: Hadley, *Azora*, “Now Fades the Opal Sky” (p. 107)

Hadley’s melodic material, however, with its simple diatonic contours and primarily step-wise motion, lacks the distinctiveness of Converse’s subtle chromatic inflections. Perhaps a more thorough application of “local color” here might have strengthened the scene’s impact. Compared to “Chonita’s Prayer,” Azora’s “Now Fades the Opal Sky” is both less memorable and less emotive. Instead, as one might expect, the composer faced charges of derivativeness.

Frederic Dean, in a review, ran through a laundry list of similarities to other composers' music: "In another scene there is a suggestion of a combination of Wolf-Ferrari and Berlioz; in another a touch of sadness that calls to mind Tchaikovsky. A recurring melody haunts the entire opera, reminding one of the *Thaïs* Meditation."⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that Hadley's rather generic compositional language here represents a specific choice which serves a definite dramatic purpose. Displaying the opera's ties to the mainstream European canon is of primary importance, for he clearly sought to avoid turning *Azora* into a gaudy Aztec spectacular.

Perhaps the most compelling example of how musical style can de-exoticize an otherwise exotic character occurs in the love duet in *Shanewis*. This lengthy scene, often referred to by the principal line of text, "Love Stole Out of the Sea," occurs soon after the title character has finished performing for the audience gathered at Mrs. Everton's home, during her first moments alone with Lionel. Since the idealized songs clearly establish Shanewis's Indian ethnicity, Cadman is now faced with the complicated issue of how to make his female lead seem like an appropriate romantic partner for his Anglo tenor Lionel. While this crossing of ethnic lines will ultimately lead to disaster, listeners must believe that their attraction to each other is both immediate and real. Cadman's duet accomplishes this through a soaring Italianate melody, a solid harmonic foundation, and rich orchestral support. The principal melody is cushioned above a tonic pedal (ex. 5.33a); the voices remain closely intertwined in thirds and sixths at the duet's climax (ex. 5.33b). All traces of Indianisms are gone, and instead, the scene appears as a close relation of Mimi and Rodolfo's meeting in the first act of *La Bohème*—a model that Cadman's audience would have been quite familiar with.

⁷⁷ Dean, "The Opera," 262. This "recurring melody" appears in ex. 5.39b and is discussed below.

SHANEWIS

Love stole out of the sea at star - break;

LIONEL

Love stole out of the sea at star - break;

mf appassionata

Ped.

Ex. 5.33a: Cadman, *Shanewis*, Love duet (p. 47)

Not know - ing what it longed for Till it found

Not know - ing what it longed for Till it found

8va

ff

you, Till it found you?

you, Till it found you?

rall.

mf a tempo

Ex. 5.33b: Cadman, *Shanewis*, Love duet (p. 49)

As Cadman's chosen musical idiom makes clear, Shanewis here steps into Lionel's world, just as he will soon enter into hers in the upcoming powwow scene. While the implicit exoticism of Shanewis's Indian idealizations first captured Lionel's attention, now these characters come together on equal terms, both musically and emotionally. In this duet, Cadman shifts styles in order to help his listeners forget the divisive issues of race and ethnicity. The serious ramifications of their differences are delayed until the opera's second half.

Sacred Music

In four of these six opera, sacred music—specifically Christian music—shapes and motivates the narrative outcome of the plots. While this ingredient, especially choral hymns, appears in many operas in the performance canon—from Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and *Parsifal* to Gounod's *Faust* and Verdi's *Il Trovatore*—in American operas from this period it often serves a deeply symbolic function, essential to the unfolding of the plot. In *Natoma*, *Narcissa*, and *Azora*, acceptance of or belief in Christianity merges with the notion of American progress and exceptionalism. The fact that this theme recurs so regularly is rather remarkable. Thus, the music that accompanies these scenes plays an essential role in conveying the intended message of each opera.

While *Poia* does include a certain amount of religious music, choral passages in particular, these are all in praise of the Blackfeet sun god and can thus be ignored here. *Shanewis* avoids the issue of religion entirely. *The Sacrifice* does include Christian religious music—an offstage chorus sings an unaccompanied hymn (ex. 5.34)—but it plays less of a role in advancing message of the opera's plot. Instead, this chorus provides musical “cover” which allows the priest, Padre Gabriel, and the Mexican soldiers to arrange a surprise attack against the

Americans. The hymn also offers hope to Chonita, who joins in singing parts of the tune, for she fears that the captured Bernal will be executed. Despite this material's rather fleeting appearance, it does supply a certain amount of local color. The text mixes Latin and Spanish words, clearly establishing the scene as a New-World mission not yet under American control. The excerpt below presents only the choral parts, excluding the sung dialogue between Chonita and Tomasa which overlaps with the hymn.⁷⁸

CHORUS (outside)



Sal - ve, Vir - gen bel - la, Pas - to - re a - gra -
 Sal - ve, Vir - gen bel - la,
 da - ble, De los pec - ca - do - res.
 Pas - to - re a - gra - da - ble De los...

Ex. 5.34: Converse, *The Sacrifice*, Mission hymn (p. 196-7)

The music of a Spanish mission occurs in *Natoma* too, yet here its function encompasses much more than just local color. Indeed, it underscores much of the title character's emotional struggle through the course of the opera's third act. Having killed Alvarado at the end of the Dagger Dance in order to stop him from kidnapping Barbara, Natoma is forced to seek sanctuary inside Father Peralta's mission. "Religioso" organ music (ex. 5.35) accompanies the priest's first appearance on the church steps as he offers Natoma protection at the end of the second act, with the organ's pedal point reinforcing the sense of security Natoma seeks from the mission. In the

⁷⁸ Again, one of the *Boston Globe* reviewer's "pages which one will probably remember."

third act, she struggles to come to terms with the ramifications of her actions, wavering between her old beliefs in the Indian god Manitou and the chance for a new life that the mission offers her. As Father Peralta convinces her to remain at the mission, the music surges towards a massive orchestral climax in celebration of Natoma's conversion (ex. 5.36). With her conflict resolved, the remainder of the opera is devoted to a double chorus Latin-language motet (ex. 5.37). This final choral number functions like the score to a silent film. The chorus sings throughout; the principals, although all on stage, are given no more lines (with the exception of a spoken invocation read by the priest). Instead, the symbolic message of Redding's libretto unfolds in action only. Paul and Barbara are united; Natoma gives her abalone amulet to Barbara, thereby relinquishing her final remaining tie to her Indian past, and joins the nuns of the convent.⁷⁹ Thus, sacred music conveys the opera's message about how the United States progresses as a nation. Paul, through his union to Barbara, represents the inheritor of this formerly Spanish territory. Natoma symbolically hands over her claim to leadership of the land, in effect giving her blessing to California's new direction, and survives only by assimilating into the body of Christian believers at the convent.

⁷⁹ These stage directions appear throughout the final 15 pages of the published piano-vocal score: "Two Friars open main door of church. Choir enter organ-loft. Acolytes light candles on altar. Father Peralta dons vestments. The church commences to fill. Paul enters, and takes seat near and facing altar. Don Francisco and Barbara enter last, taking seats across aisle from Paul, facing altar. Natoma is standing on upper step of altar, facing full length of church, recognizing no one. Peralta mounts pulpit. [Peralta delivers his spoken invocation. Offstage nuns begin to sing the 'Sanctus.'] Natoma turns and looks at Peralta, who bows slightly and benignly. The Nuns enter from doorway of convent-garden. Natoma slowly steps down into main aisle, and walks to where Barbara and Paul are seated opposite each other. The Nuns kneel on either sides of cross-aisle. Natoma turns in main aisle, facing the altar. Barbara and Paul come into main aisle, clasp hands, and kneel facing altar in front of Natoma. [The chorus sings 'Hosanna!'] Natoma lifts amulet from off her neck, and places it over Barbara's shoulders. Natoma turns again, facing length of church, and resumes her slow walk. When she reaches cross-aisle she turns to the right, walking between the kneeling nuns. She proceeds to doorway of convent-garden. The nuns rise, and walk past her on either side, entering the convent-garden. Peralta lists his hands in benediction. All kneel. Natoma pauses in doorway of convent-garden, contending with suppressed emotions, her back to audience. She enters the convent-garden, and the doors close upon her. Curtain." See Victor Herbert, *Natoma* (New York: Schirmer, 1911), 320–35.

Andante religioso

Organ *p* *espress.* *molto cresc. e molto allarg.*

Ex. 5.35: Herbert, *Natoma*, sacred organ music (p. 287)

FATHER PERALTA

She will lift thy soul

un - til it joins the spir - it of thy

Fa - ther, thy Fa - ther in the clouds a - bove the moun - tain.

Meno mosso

rit. pesante

Ex. 5.36: Herbert, *Natoma*, Natoma's conversion scene (p. 316-7)

1st CHORUS

Do - o Pa - tri sit glo - ri - a, et Fi - li - o, qui a mor - tu - is sur - re - xit,

2nd CHORUS

De - o Pa - tri sit glo - ri - a, et Fi - li - o

ac pa - ra - cli - to, in sem - pi - ter - na sae - cu - la.

ac pa - ra - cli - to, in sem - pi - ter - na sae - cu - la.

Organ

p *p*

rit. *ff*

Ex. 5.37: Herbert, *Natoma*, final double chorus (p. 321-3)

This same theme is at work in *Azora*. Once again, acceptance of Christianity becomes the only acceptable path forward into modernity. Older beliefs—that is, the Aztec practice of human sacrifice—have no place in the scheme of progress, which is embodied here by Cortez, his Soldiers and the Spanish Priests. Hadley first introduces this trope during a lengthy narrative for Papantzin, sister of Montezuma. She relates a vision in which she has foreseen the arrival of Cortez’s fleet and that they bring a new religion, the one true belief in Christ. At first

declamatory (ex. 5.38a), the music later broadens to admit a lyrical melody and some inventive harmonic touches (ex. 5.38b). The unexpected a-flat minor chord (second example, end of the first system) and the deceptive resolution from an F dominant seventh chord into a g-minor seventh chord (middle second system) reflect Papan's longing for this new faith as the harmonies search for tonic stability. The Aztec High Priest, Canek, is furious that she would interrupt his preparations for the sacrifice with what he calls "mockery," but Montezuma is troubled, noting that his heart "yields a note of vague response." Ultimately, his anger towards Xalca and Azora gains the upper hand over Papan's vision and prevents him from leaving his traditional beliefs behind.

PAPANTZIN

Then spake the Youth: Be - hold! the War - ri - ors of God are they, The

One Great God of All! And bring His Word un-to thy race.

dim. *p* *cresc.* *ff a tempo*

Ex. 5.38a: Hadley, *Azora*, Papantzin's narrative (p. 60)

There is no oth - er God save Him on High, And Christ the
on - ly Sac - ri - fice!
a tempo *accel.*

Ex. 5.38b: Hadley, *Azora*, Papantzin's narrative (p. 61)

This conflict finally boils over in the third act. Xalca and Azora are on the verge of becoming human sacrifices themselves when the ceremony is interrupted by the arrival of the Spaniards, who enter with a style of sacred choral music similar to what has already been examined in *Natoma* and *The Sacrifice* (ex. 5.39a). Although it only becomes apparent in hindsight, the principal choral melody has already been heard in the instrumental introduction to the act, played by a solo violin over an accompaniment of muted strings (ex. 5.39b). Thus, from the opening of the act, Hadley chooses to foreshadow the “glorious banners” that will ultimately conclude the opera. The minor key version of the melody in the act’s prelude reflects the perilous situation in which both Azora and Xalca find themselves (they are awaiting their execution). The subsequent, triumphant choral setting resounds above a pedal point from the tympani, effectively conveying the strength of “the love divine of Christ our Lord” and the salvation that the arrival of Cortez represents for Azora, Xalca, and Papan.

CHORUS OF SPANIARDS

Be - hold, we come with glo - rious ban - ners float - ing

Pro - claim - ing Love,

(timpani roll) Pro -

high, glo - rious ban - ners, pro - claim - ing the love of Christ our Lord!

Love di - vine, Love di - vine of Christ our Lord!

claim - ing Love of Christ our Lord!

Ex. 5.39a: Hadley, *Azora*, Christian chorus (p. 204-6)

Andantino

Solo Violin

p

3

p

Strings (muted)

Ex. 5.39b: Hadley, *Azora*, Act III introduction (p. 178)

Understandably, the thematic elements advanced through the plots of both *Natoma* and *Azora* are more than a little distasteful today. The symbolic tropes of religious superiority, obligatory assimilation and American exceptionalism that play out in these scenes could understandably offend some individuals given today's different attitudes towards inclusiveness and tolerance. At the time, however, audiences found nothing remarkable about how these plots ultimately resolved. While some commentators did find much that was ridiculous or unbelievable, nowhere does the period's critical commentary suggest that any of this might be objectionable. Instead, the music for these scenes was regarded as some of the strongest in each opera. A *New York Times* critic praised Herbert's "use of churchly effects in the last act" noting that they were "carried out with skill, and the result is truly impressive."⁸⁰ Hadley's early biographer Herbert Boardman enjoyed how, "whenever the Christian element is in the foreground, a sense of spirituality seems to be reflected in the music."⁸¹ Whatever one's opinion of these passages, it is important to remember that these composers are not in any way attempting to write sacred opera. Even though Christianity plays a pivotal role in their plot outcomes, neither work could be adapted to fit the context of a religious observance. The entertainment value far outweighs whatever spiritual didacticism might pass through their pages.

In *Narcissa*, however, the stylistic blend is fundamentally different. Moore instead makes Christianity and its accompanying sacred music the centerpiece of her score. With missionaries as her lead characters, there can be no doubt that her opera functions as both a theatrical entertainment and a teaching tool. While both *Natoma*'s final act and *Narcissa*'s opening act take place inside a church, only in *Narcissa* does Moore compose an on-stage church service. Indeed, as Moore's biographers explain, "The self-sufficient, cantata-like nature of this act, together with

⁸⁰ "Natoma Greeted By Great Audience," *New York Times*, 1 March 1911.

⁸¹ Herbert R. Boardman, *Henry Hadley: Ambassador of Harmony* (Atlanta, Ga.: Banner Press, 1932), 131.

its declarations of religious fervor and patriotism, make it suitable for separate concert performance; there were several such performances over the years, often in church settings.”⁸² As in the other operas, Christianity again functions as a symbol of American patriotism, national progress, and territorial expansion, but only in *Narcissa* are the characters actually defined by their faith. Thus, sacred music is not simply a backdrop to the unfolding plot events, as it most conspicuously is in *Natoma*, but rather it is included as an integral part of daily life.

Moore integrates Hymn singing, in particular, throughout her score. Unlike the “local color” function of the mission hymn in *The Sacrifice*, Moore’s newly composed hymns contribute to the characterization of her lead roles, since they sing them at times of great conflict or personal significance. The first act begins with an elaborate, motet-like choral number, followed by three homophonic hymns that reflect upon the unfolding plot events.⁸³ The first of these is a direct quotation of OLD HUNDRED. Moore could hardly have chosen a more familiar hymn tune. It welcomes the most ecumenical body of believers into what might otherwise be a story of only parochial or regional appeal. A hymn next appears in the second act when the missionaries celebrate their safe arrival at Fort Vancouver (now a National Historic Site in present-day Washington state). In the third act, the missionaries teach the Indians a hymn-like setting of the Lord’s Prayer, translated into what is ostensibly their own language. (In fact, it is a Chinook-language translation; the Cayuse tribe had their own unique language.) Incipits from these passages are given in the table below, along with each hymn’s full text and a description of its plot function.

⁸² Catherine Parsons Smith and Cynthia S. Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore, American Composer* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 72–3.

⁸³ The plot of the act involves Marcus Whitman’s unexpected return (accompanied by two Indians), his plans to depart again immediately to found a mission, Narcissa’s decision to join him, their on-the-spot marriage, and final departure—all within the context of a Presbyterian service, interrupted upon Marcus’s arrival. (How fortunate to have a minister on hand, since the wedding vows are exchanged within minutes of Marcus’s return.)

Table 5.1: Hymns from *Narcissa*

By the riv - ers of Bab - y - lon There we sat down, yea wept

By Bab - y - lon There we sat down, yea wept

p *mp*

Ex. 5.40: opening chorus (p. 2)

*By the rivers of Babylon
There we sat down, yea wept,
When we remember'd Zion, yea Zion.
We hang'd our harps upon the willows,
In the midst thereof
For there, they that carried us away captive
Required of us a song, saying:
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."
How shall we sing the Lord's song,
In a strange land
How sing in a strange land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem
Let my right hand forget her cunning,
If I forget thee, Oh Jerusalem.*

—text from Psalm 137: 1–5

This Psalm of Exile appropriately foreshadows the isolation and loneliness that Narcissa will find in her life as a missionary, especially during the period when Marcus leaves her to travel to Washington, D.C., to seek governmental assistance for the newly arriving settlers. Narcissa revisits the emotional terrain of this Psalm in an Act IV soliloquy.

Lord bless us now, and hear our pray'r, Con - strain our hearts to praise.

Ex. 5.41: original hymn tune (p. 52)

*Lord bless us now, and hear our pray'r
Constrain our hearts to praise.
Our faith in Thee, we all declare,
Tho' dark or bright the days.
Our faith in Thee, Thy work our joy,
Tho' danger pave the way.*

The congregation sings this hymn as a benediction upon the decision of the four missionaries, the Whitmans and the Spaldings, to head westward. Again, the text reflects the difficulties that lie ahead.

Table 5.1 (cont.)

Scenes of sac - red peace and pleas - ure, Ho - ly days and Sab - bath bell,

Ex. 5.42: original hymn tune, choral parts only (p. 58-9)

*Scenes of sacred peace and pleasure,
Holy days and Sabbath bell,
Richest, brightest, sweetest treasure,
Can I say a last farewell?
Yes, my native land, I love thee,
All thy scenes, I love them well.
Friends, connections, happy country,
Can I bid a last farewell?*

This hymn, sung by the congregation and joined by Narcissa, ends the first act. Here, the link between nation and faith is made explicit: Christian duty and nation building are coequal pursuits.

NARCISSA and ELIZA
Now the wear - y toil is end - ed, jour - ney long o'er mount and plain,
MARCUS and HENRY

Ex. 5.43: original hymn tune (p. 102)

*Now the weary toil is ended,
Journey long o'er mount and plain,
Westward we our way have wended
Now at last our goal we gain.*

This brief hymnic statement is sung offstage by the four missionaries as they approach Fort Vancouver. Their song reassures the Fort's residents, who were at first fearful of the strangers. It excites Chief Yellow Serpent, who has long been awaiting missionaries to teach the Bible to his tribe.

Table 5.1 (cont.)

NARCISSA, SISKADEE, MARCUS, and chorus of Indians

mp Ne - si - ka, Pa - pa Klax - ta Ko - pa, Sagh - a - lie

Ex. 5.44: The Lord's Prayer, texture reduced (p. 166)

This hymn presents the first line of the Lord's Prayer in a Chinook-language translation. The example includes this passage in its entirety. Waskema's interruption (not shown) precludes any further singing of the prayer. Her subsequent attempt to persuade the Indians not to trust the missionaries illustrates the deteriorating relations that will ultimately lead to the so-called Whitman Massacre. Moore's decision to usher in this dramatic turning point with an interrupted hymn is particularly striking.

Just as Moore's hymns convey the present needs and concerns of her characters, prayer too plays a significant role in reflecting the inner feelings of the title character. This is especially true of the prayer that Narcissa sings near the beginning of the third act (ex. 5.45). The scene begins after several years have elapsed; the mission is established yet struggling to be successful. Narcissa is feeling overcome by stresses of missionary life and the rigors of the frontier. She is particularly troubled by the "Eyes! Eyes! Ev'ewhere they are! No hour of day or night may we escape them, save in darkness [or] sleep," for the Indians keep constant watch over the missionaries.⁸⁴ It is out of this emotional turmoil that Narcissa turns to prayer. Her entreaty concludes, "Oh prosper us in work, in work for Thee. Bless us, nerve our hearts, our hands, in

⁸⁴ Narcissa sings this text on page 142 of the published piano-vocal score.

thine employ.” Here, Narcissa asks not for personal attention but rather for the strength to continue to do God’s work. Moore clearly sought to emphasize Narcissa’s spiritual strength.



Ex. 5.45: Moore, *Narcissa*, prayer scene (p. 143)

The composer highlights this character trait even more prominently later in the same act. Following the Chinook Lord’s Prayer (ex. 5.44 above) and the disruption caused by Waskema and Delaware Tom’s anti-settler rhetoric, Narcissa once again turns to her faith for strength and to restore order. She begins to sing the 23rd Psalm (ex. 5.46).⁸⁵ As the stage directions explain, this Psalm has an immediate and powerful impact. Her singing calms the unruly Indians, who “gradually stop menacing Marcus and listen to Narcissa.” A key lighting effect also heightens the drama of this moment: “The sun, now shining brightly over the mountains, shines in through the door and windows, illuminating Narcissa’s face and hair. The Indians accept it as an omen, and are deeply impressed.” The harp-like, rolled-chord accompaniment reinforces the heavenly connotations of the stage imagery. Clearly, Moore’s operatic version of Narcissa Whitman is a woman empowered by her faith, called to serve, and deserving of our admiration. Thus, the tragedy of her subsequent death at the hands of the Indians seems all the more potent.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Moore’s setting presents the first three and a half verses.

⁸⁶ In historical reality—details of which have emerged only through more recent scholarship—Narcissa was neither a compassionate nor an effective missionary towards the Cayuse Indians, a people whom she neither liked nor respected. Narcissa herself described them as “insolent, proud, domineering, arrogant, and ferocious.” She was the only woman killed by the Indians—her body was also mutilated—suggesting that their anger towards the white

NARCISSA

The Lord my Shep-herd is, I shall not want. He

mak-eth me to lie in pas-tures green

Ex. 5.46: Moore, *Narcissa*, 23rd Psalm, unruly Indian shouts not shown (p. 171)

Critics found the sacred aspects of Moore's score to be its single most compelling feature. Paul Hedrick, reviewing the premiere, observed that the "church music in the ... first act went straight into the hearts of the audience. Its appeal was such that none could resist." He also considered the hymn-tune "Lord Bless Us Now" (ex. 5.41 above) to be a demonstration of "Mrs. Moore's best work in ensemble writing of a religious character."⁸⁷ A Chicago critic, hearing a later revival performance, went so far as to compare Moore's opera to "the Passion Play at Oberammergau. ... *Narcissa* approaches nearer to that than anything else I have ever witnessed."⁸⁸

settlers was in particular directed towards her. The other women at the mission remained unharmed. For more on Narcissa's view of Indians, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Converting the West: A Biography of Narcissa Whitman* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 101–7, 148–9, and 164 (source of quote above). For a narrative of the Indians' reaction to the expanding population of white settlers and of the massacre itself, see pages 210–22.

⁸⁷ Hedrick, "Narcissa Approved," *Seattle Daily Times*, 23 April 1912.

⁸⁸ An unnamed critic for the *Chicago Advance*, quoted in "Mary Carr Moore," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 December 1926.

As striking as Moore's spiritual focus may be, this trait makes her score the least operatic of this group. After only a single hearing at the premiere, J. Willis Sayre already recognized exactly that:

If *Narcissa* should succeed, then, in a far country, in its present form, it will be not because it is in line with dramatic or grand operatic traditions, but in spite of the fact that it is not. In that event its original and characteristic music and its pictorial possibilities will carry it to success. It has unlimited quantities of both.⁸⁹

Opera on a Grand Scale

Having examined various individual musical components, it now remains to turn to larger ensemble scenes. In the following examples, composers combine multiple musical layers in order to present a range of these individual elements in interaction. The finale of Hadley's *Azora* would seem at first to offer a good example. It combines solo lines for the five principal characters with a triple chorus divided between the Aztecs, Cortez's Spanish soldiers, and the Spanish priests. Such a mix might have allowed for a varied interplay of contrasting types of musical materials. Instead, the composer assigns the same material to each disparate group, overlaying their different texts one on top of the other. (Two full pages are given in example 5.47.) One cannot help but feel that Hadley missed an opportunity here. There is no reason why the Christians and the Aztecs should sing identical music. Critics too reacted negatively, arguing that Hadley focused on the general soundworld of his massed forces rather than a dramatic rendering of his plot. The *Musical Courier* detected an overall "lack of respect for the human voice. For [Hadley,] a singer is but an instrumentalist, a part of his symphonic scheme and

⁸⁹ J. Willis Sayre, "Local Grand Opera Heartily Applauded," *Seattle Daily Times*, 23 April 1912.

nothing more.”⁹⁰ Indeed, despite the fact that the characters on stage represent two mutually antagonistic groups, their shared material fails to capitalize on the potentials of operatic drama.

More musically compelling is a quintet for the five principals—Azora, Papantzin, Xalca, Ramatzin and Canek (ex. 5.48). Again, Hadley’s vocal lines function instrumentally. Compared to something like the quintet in *Rigoletto*, one might miss Verdi’s specific characterization of the individual vocal lines. However, the uniqueness of this number is noteworthy. Among the other five American composers considered here, only Hadley seemed interested in traditional operatic ensemble writing. In fact, this quintet and an earlier trio with Azora, Ramatzin, and Canek are the only examples of this type of polyphonic singing to be found anywhere in these operas.

⁹⁰ “Chicago Hears Premiere of Henry Hadley’s *Azora*,” *Musical Courier*, 10 January 1918, quoted in John C. Canfield, “Henry Kimball Hadley: His Life and Works (1871–1937)” (Ed.D. diss., Florida State University, 1960), 146.

Example 5.47: Hadley, *Azora*, finale (p. 217-8)

Azora and Xalca

Papan *ff* Be - hold, they

Ramatzin *ff* Where is thy pow'r?

Montezuma *ff* Where is thy pow'r?

Montezuma's Priests and People *ff*

Where is thy pow'r, O might - ty god of life and

Where is thy pow'r, O might - ty god of life and

Where is thy pow'r?

Spaniards *ff*

Be - hold, we come with glo - rious ban - ners float - ing

Be - hold, we come with glo - rious ban - ners float - ing

Be - hold, we come!

Spanish Priests *ff*

Be - hold, we come!

Be - hold, we come!

f They come, bring - ing, come bring - ing light where all was

come, with ban - ners float -

death? thy all - com - pel -

death? Where thy po - tent arm, thy all - com -

high! with ban - ners float -

high! glo - rious ban - ners, glo - rious ban - ners

f Ho - di - e Chris - tus

f Ho - di - e Chris - tus

Example 5.48: Hadley, *Azora*, quintet (p. 189)

Moderato con gentilezza e dolcezza

Azora *p* For Xal - ca would I live!

Papan Hear them, A - zo - ra!

Xalca I fear not death's sem -

sake?
Ramatzin We beg you to yield, A - zo - ra!

Canek

Moderato con gentilezza e dolcezza

Ob.

p Strg.

Horn

Think you that my heart's de - sire I can light - ly re-sign?

Though you re - sign your

brace if you will live!

Am I hate - ful still? Ah

Lis - ten, A - zo - ra! We beg you to yield and

Clar.

A more diverse example forms the Act III finale of Moore's *Narcissa*. The composer combines vocal lines for seven principals—Narcissa, Siskadee, Waskema, Marcus, Elijah, Delaware Tom, and Dr. McLaughlin—with a double chorus of Indians and “Immigrants” (the newly arrived American settlers). While Moore's musical characterization of different groups and individuals is not overwhelmingly distinctive, at least they do not sing identical material. Narcissa and Siskadee both lament the departure of their partners, Marcus and Elijah, who are ambitiously setting out on important expeditions of their own. The new settlers are thankful for their safe arrival and are proud to claim this territory for their country, singing, “We’ve come to take possession of this land, to build a state, our country’s flag sustain.” As if to reaffirm her patriotic intentions, Moore even incorporates motives quoted from the National Anthem into the accompaniment, easily spotted in the treble of the piano part below (ex. 5.49). The composer's biographers suggest that this quotation functions as Moore's “correction” to Puccini's ironic use of the same theme in *Madama Butterfly*.⁹¹ Dr. McLaughlin, still the head of the British Fort Vancouver, realizes that this territory will soon belong to the United States and sings, “with the morrow, my state is gone.” Because Moore sought a sympathetic portrayal of the Indians, they too have a voice. Following the lead of Delaware Tom, they mourn that “the Indians’ fate is sealed; his doom is sealed,” as Waskema adds the sound of a wailing, chromatic cry.

⁹¹ Smith and Richardson argue that for Moore, the melody “symbolize[s] the winning of the American West, a noble cause.” See *Mary Carr Moore*, 74 and 233, n14.

Example 5.49: Moore, *Narcissa*, Act III finale (p. 207-8)

Na. Si. Tho' breaks my heart, Tho'

Wa. *mf* Woe

Ma. El. For prize soon won

D.T. *mf* The In-dian's

Dr.M. state is gone. My doom comes

IMIGRANTS *mf* come. From sea to sea, The play we re-vere. Shall

INDIANS *mf* Woe *mf* Woe

The In-dian's

Na. Si. I'll speed thee on I'll speed thee

Wa. *mf* breaks my heart. I'll speed thee on, Woe!

Ma. El. Joy For

D.T. doom, His doom, His

Dr.M. with the mor-row My

IMIGRANTS proud-ly float, shall proud-ly float, O'er

INDIANS proud-ly float, shall float: O'er

His doom, His

doom His doom,

However, for the most vivid and diverse American scene of all, we must turn to the powwow scene from Cadman's *Shanewis*. Rather than smoothing over musical differences to achieve a more cohesive whole as Moore partly and Hadley completely did, Cadman revels in the contrasts that unique music for different groups allows. His present-day setting also permits a more diverse musical mix than the historical plots of the other operas do. Because of its wide array of musical ingredients, this scene, more than any other, captures the full breadth and scope of the period's approach to composing American opera.

It is first necessary to illustrate this scene's musical components separately. They are discussed here in the order in which they appear. When the curtain rises, the Indians are performing a powwow song for the gathered audience of white spectators (previously shown in ex. 5.17a). The festival has attracted a number of vendors who are selling balloons, lemonade, and ice cream to the attendees. Each has a distinctive sellers' call, anticipating a similar scene in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* by more than 15 years. The example below (ex. 5.50a) gives the balloon vendors' call. The female half of the Anglo-American chorus, representing the spectators at the powwow (ex. 5.50b), gossip together about a flirtatious young couple they have spotted—Lionel and Shanewis, of course—while the men chat about the crops and the weather (ex. 5.50c). During these statements from the chorus of spectators, the Indians' powwow song—with its aggressive accompaniment and driving rhythms—continues uninterrupted.

TOY-BALLOON VENDORS

Bal-loons, bal-loons, Just like the A-mer-i-can flag!

Ex. 5.50a: Cadman, *Shanewis*, balloon vendors' call (p. 79)

FEMALE SPECTATORS
scherzando

See the hand-some man with the pret-ty In-dian maid; I won-der, is it a flir-ta-tion?

Ex. 5.50b: Cadman, *Shanewis*, female spectators, vocal lines only (p. 80-1)

MALE SPECTATORS
vigoroso

The crops are look-ing fine, but we need more rain, we need more rain. This wind is de-struc-tive; the soil is dry!

Ex. 5.50c: Cadman, *Shanewis*, male spectators, vocal lines only (p. 81-3)

Next, Cadman redirects the audience's attention towards his romantic leads. The Indian singing has subsided for the moment and an entirely new musical texture appears. What the composer calls a "jazz-band of eight young people" is instructed to "circle around Shanewis and Lionel in mock serenade" (ex. 5.50d). This is one of the most frequently misrepresented passages in all of American opera. Many sources erroneously describe this "on-stage jazz band" as if it

were some kind of clairvoyant anticipation of Krenek's *Jonny Spielt Auf* (1927).⁹² This is not an actual jazz band, nor are there on-stage instruments. (Perhaps some confusion arises from the on-stage piano accompanist in the opera's first scene.) Instead, Cadman's material is something of a singularity. The singers vocalize on the syllable "za," with their four-part homophonic harmonies set to the syncopated rhythm of the cakewalk and a stride bass accompaniment, a feature especially apparent in the published piano reduction. This style shares a certain kinship with early Tin Pan Alley ragtime songs, such as Howard and Emerson's "Hello! Ma Baby" (1899). Cadman's use of the term "jazz" itself is notable for 1918; the "Original Dixieland Jazz Band" had only begun performing in New York and issuing recordings the previous year. Perhaps, Cadman's intent only becomes clear in hindsight. The composer later explained that he considered jazz to be "an exotic expression of our national life" which "reflect[s] the restless energy and spirit of the day"—thus making "jazz" a fitting ingredient within the context of this operatic powwow scene.⁹³ (Note that the example below omits the additional choral layers for spectators and Indians which overlap with the initial and final measures of this excerpt.)

As the activity of the powwow winds down, two "High school girls" are drawn in to the Lionel and Shanewis romance. They add their own duet in thirds and sixths (ex. 5.50e). Introducing a third accompanimental type, this passage acts as underscoring while the two principals converse about how happy they are to be together (these solo lines not shown).

⁹² For example, John Dizikes mentions how Cadman "added modern elements to the score" including "a jazz band in one scene," while even Cadman's biographer Harry Perison describes "a stage band playing 'jazz.'" See Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 380; and Perison, "Charles Wakefield Cadman," 191.

⁹³ Cadman quoted in Lulu Sanford-Tefft, *Little Intimate Stories of Charles Wakefield Cadman* (Hollywood: David Graham Fischer Corp., 1926), 13–4.

JAZZ BAND of eight young people

This musical score is for a jazz band piece. It features a vocal line with lyrics 'Za za za za za za za za za' and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has four flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat) and the time signature is 2/4. The piano part includes triplet figures in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system showing a continuation of the vocal melody and piano accompaniment.

Ex. 5.50d: Cadman, *Shanewis*, “jazz band” (p. 83-4)

HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS

This musical score is for a piece titled 'High School Girls'. It features a vocal line with lyrics 'Oh, Sum - mer of Love, with winds that blow o'er the rip - 'ning corn, Our hearts, too, are rip - 'ning in the mel - low har - vest sun' and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 6/8. The piano part includes a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system showing a continuation of the vocal melody and piano accompaniment.

Ex. 5.50e: Cadman, *Shanewis*, high school girls (p. 86-7)

Throughout this scene, the composer blends his ingredients into all manner of combinations. The flow of ideas is as natural and conversational as an operatic version of reality can be. See below for one full page of the score in which six of these strands appear at once (ex. 5.51). Vendors' cries combine with Lionel and Shanewis' duetting, the Indians conclude their performance, and the spectators recognize that the festival is almost over. Cadman here provides a powerful vision of American diversity. To return to his quote with which this chapter began, the music of this powwow scene not only "smacks of a European conservatory [and] of the broad, free reaches of the Far West," but it also finds room for that most contemporary of American sounds, "jazz." Without question, this scene does indeed "presage something finer, something higher to strive for."

Example 5.51: Cadman, *Shanewis*, powwow scene (p. 90)

86 [The vendors begin to pack their wares.]

Shan. I come.

Lion. come with me!

B.V. Clos - ing out bal - loons!

L.V. Clos - ing out lem - on - ade!

Indians

SOPR. Yo ho ho ho Hi yo ho hi yo ho

ALTO

TEN.

BASS

now the end has come,

Speclators

now the end has come,

86

The musical score is written for a scene from Cadman's *Shanewis*. It begins with a rehearsal mark 86 and a stage direction: "[The vendors begin to pack their wares.]". The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The vocal parts include Shanewis (Shan.), Lionel (Lion.), B.V. (Baritone Voice), L.V. (Lute Voice), and a group of Indians (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). There are also parts for Spectators and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: Shanewis: "I come."; Lionel: "come with me!"; B.V.: "Clos - ing out bal - loons!"; L.V.: "Clos - ing out lem - on - ade!"; Indians: "Yo ho ho ho Hi yo ho hi yo ho"; Spectators: "now the end has come,". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some chords and a final cadence.

* * * * *

It is by now surely apparent that there can be no simple, all-inclusive definition of the general musical style of these works. Nevertheless, some basic principals do apply. Although each work occupies its own unique soundworld, as a group these composers share a consistent set of stylistic parameters and musical ingredients. A work's resultant style depends upon each individual's experiences, abilities, tastes and preferences, always in service to the dramaturgical demands of the libretto. Overall, the style of these operas is a cumulative and heterogeneous one, the sum of all of their component parts. While each work fits comfortably alongside the established European performance repertoire, both old and new, the music for Indian, Spanish/Mexican and American characters declares a distinctively New-World provenance. But were these ingredients enough to result in that apparently elusive phenomenon, American National Opera? The final chapter of this dissertation will attempt to address this lingering question.

CHAPTER 6 — Curtain: Audience Reception and Later Revivals

A number of American operas have been considered worthy of preservation for posterity. There is, however, no consensus as to whether they should be embalmed, congealed, or mummified.¹

—Gilbert Chase

Chase's assessment at first might seem close to the truth in regards to the six operas examined in this dissertation. Admittedly, their existence now resides primarily on the fringes of American music historiography. One might recognize the names of these operas, but few have any familiarity with their music. None have been commercially recorded and none are in the repertory of any major professional opera company. In this sense, all have indeed been "embalmed, congealed, or mummified" for an opera can only truly live in performance on stage. However, the history of these works following the day of their premieres suggests a livelier existence than Chase's formulation suggests. This chapter will resume the narrative where chapter two left off and trace the progress of the initial performance runs and any later revivals.

In the previous chapters, the critical commentary surrounding these works provided the foundation for my analysis. However, one aspect of reception history has thus far been overlooked: the reaction of the audience and the public to these works. This is an essential part of their history, for in terms of the formation of national opera, audience response is perhaps the most important factor (see chapter 2). Contrary to what one might suspect, given these operas' current reputation, the first audiences greeted each work with an overwhelming show of support. They did not at all perceive these works to be the operatic failures that later commentators have

¹ Gilbert Chase, *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 545.

described. Yet despite initial success, their fortunes soon faded—some quicker than others—so that by the middle of the century, none retained a vital position within the nation’s operatic scene. Ultimately, this chapter traces an inevitable process of decline, as tastes changed and the era of American late-Romanticism came to an end.

Audience Reception and Subsequent Performance History

Across this group of six works, a general pattern of audience response emerges. Attendees, encouraged by pre-performance press coverage, understood that in witnessing a premiere they were participating in a significant artistic happening, not just for the host city, but also for the nation’s cultural scene as a whole. Numerous curtain calls and lengthy ovations consistently greeted each opera. Regardless of any critical reservations expressed by reviewers the following morning, the audience members themselves could not have been any more enthusiastic. H. Earle Johnson’s observation is especially pertinent here. In the introduction to his 1964 catalogue, *Operas on American Subjects*, he notes, “were good wishes the balancing criteria, we would now enjoy a modest number of successful [American] operas.... The customarily dim aftermath supplied by the critics seems inappropriate to the festive nature of the openings.”² One cannot help but observe how today’s historiography has privileged the period’s critical assessment over the public’s supportiveness of these operas. This section of the dissertation, therefore, will help to redress this imbalance. Despite a consistent pattern of audience reception, however, it is in the subsequent performance and revival histories that key differences begin to emerge. Thus, my narrative here departs from chronology and instead addresses each work from least to greatest longevity in terms of on-stage performance life,

² H. Earle Johnson, *Operas on American Subjects* (New York: Coleman-Ross Company, 1964), 13.

thereby offering one possible way to measure a work's lasting impact on the nation's operatic scene.³ Nevin's *Poia*, however, offers an exception to almost every rule, hence a discussion of this opera will be reserved until last.

Despite its high musical quality, Converse's *The Sacrifice* was unfortunately the shortest-lived and most localized work of this group. Nevertheless, the audience response exemplifies the usual pattern. The opera's four appearances occurred within a fifteen-day span, given by Converse's hometown Boston Opera Company to conclude their 1910–11 season. For the premiere (3 March 1911), the city's elite turned out to support their local composer. This was "an audience which filled the great auditorium [and] expressed delight throughout and insisted upon many curtain calls," as the *New York Times* reported.⁴ Attendees included the current and former governors of Massachusetts. Composers George Whitefield Chadwick and Arthur Foote were both in the audience as was Ralph Flanders, then director of the New England Conservatory. The press also supplied commentary on the gowns and jewels worn by the society women and box holders. As a *Boston Globe* reporter observed, "The audience included practically all the most prominent musicians of the city ... and the whole feeling in the house seemed to be a critical curiosity, ready to be enthusiastic, but demanding cause."⁵

This journalist seemed particularly attentive to the audience's response following each act of Converse's score, a scene he describes throughout the article. Following the first act:

...there was no wild hastening to the lobbies to enthuse. To be sure, it is uncommon for Boston audiences to promenade at the end of a first act, but as a matter of fact, the

³ For a listing of other noteworthy American premiere performances contemporary with these operas, see Henry C. Lahee, *Annals of Music in America: A Chronological Record of Significant Musical Events, From 1640 to the Present Day* (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1922).

⁴ "American Opera, *The Sacrifice*, Sung," *New York Times*, 4 March 1911.

⁵ This quotation and information on attendance taken from "The *Sacrifice* Is Given Its Premiere," *Boston Globe*, 4 March 1911.

cognoscenti would have been out had they already arrived at their opinions concerning the new opera. ... People waited.

Apparently, the composer had not yet won over his assembled supporters. Thankfully, any anxiety he might have been feeling was soon put to rest at the end of the second act:

And this time the audience fairly broke loose in enthusiasm. From the crowded topmost gallery to the ranked rows of the orchestra the storm raged universal. Principals, conductor and composer were called before the curtain again and again. Flowers by the armful for everybody—smiles, shouts from above.... The crisis was passed: the opera was accepted by the public with shouts of enthusiasm. In a twinkling the lobbies were crowded and everybody was ready to say he liked the new work.

Ultimately, the night ended in total triumph for Converse and his collaborators:

And at the final curtain the house went wild. Again and again the smiling singers came forth, again and again conductor and composer bowed their acknowledgments. Finally Mr. Converse was forced to speak. ... He tried to say how delighted he felt, but he showed it better than he said it. And it was a very happy audience that went out into the night where the automobiles were drumming.⁶

Admittedly, the composer faced an audience biased in his favor, but that should not detract from the genuineness of their enthusiasm. A similar reception greeted the opera at its three subsequent appearances. Building upon the success of the premiere, the performers too continued to strengthen their presentation. The *Boston Globe* writer later observed, “Repetition has done much to bring about a smooth performance by singers and orchestra. Passages which sounded confused at first have become clearer and more pleasing to the ear. The music of the third act has improved with further acquaintance.”⁷

Within the overall context of the Boston Opera’s season, *The Sacrifice* received an average number of repetitions. The most performed opera of the season was Puccini’s new opera, *La Fanciulla del West*, given seven times. But *The Sacrifice* was in good company; *Rigoletto*,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Day at the Opera,” *Boston Globe*, 19 March 1911. This item is a brief review of the opera’s fourth and final performance, a matinee.

Faust, *Il Traviatore*, and *Il barbiere di Siviglia* each received four repetitions, in a season that also included the American premieres of Raul Laparra's *La Habañera* and Debussy's *L'Enfant Prodigue*. The entire season offered 26 operas in four different languages.⁸ These figures demonstrate that, in context, a new American opera could make for a perfectly normal inclusion within an opera company's season. *The Sacrifice* did not require special treatment of any kind; rather it was prepared and presented just as any other work would be.

Despite this overwhelming show of audience and community support, *The Sacrifice* did not return in following seasons, nor did any other opera companies attempt a revival. Alice Nielsen recorded "Chonita's Prayer" (a role she created) for Columbia Records in 1911, but in general, Converse's score lacks the type of extractable vocal numbers or orchestral highlights that made for simple concert programming.⁹ Instead, Converse turned his attention to a new work, planned for the Boston Opera Company's 1915–16 season. Titled *The Immigrants*, the work would have enacted a contemporary plot in an urban American setting, far removed from the historical exoticism of *The Sacrifice*.¹⁰ Unfortunately, faced with insurmountable financial difficulties, the Boston Opera Company declared bankruptcy at the end of the 1914–15 season, and thus Converse's final opera was never performed.

Like *The Sacrifice*, Hadley's *Azora* also received only four performances, but at least opera lovers in two cities had the opportunity to witness a performance. In the words of newspaper commentators who attended the premiere (26 December 1917), the audience extended

⁸ Data summarized from "Review of the Second Season of Grand Opera," *Boston Globe*, 20 March 1911.

⁹ This recording is available on the disc *Souvenirs from American Opera*, International Record Collectors' Club, IRCC-CD 818, n.d.

¹⁰ For information on *The Immigrants*, see Charles Freeman, "American Realism and Progressivism in Chadwick's *The Padrone* and Converse's *The Immigrants*" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1999); and "A 'Progressive' Opera? Frederick Converse's *The Immigrants*," *Opera Journal* 32, no. 1 (March 1999): 3–18.

“one of the most remarkable demonstrations of good-will that the Auditorium has witnessed in years,” providing a “reception of the native work [that] was cordial and hearty, at times even noisy, in the outspoken fashion of the West.”¹¹ After three performances in Chicago, the company departed for an Eastern tour and mounted the opera once more in New York. This gala presentation drew “a large and unusually representative audience” which was “more than usually enthusiastic, and brought the artists, Mr. Hadley and Mr. Stevens before the curtain many times.”¹² The final ovation grew increasingly patriotic until finally “a large silken flag, a gift to Hadley, was held aloft by Anna Fitzu [who created the title role] while the orchestra’s concertmaster led ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ and many sang the air.”¹³ Clearly, the New York audience was thrilled to welcome such an “all-American” product to the operatic stage.

However, from the outset there were signs of the work’s limited durability. One reporter noted that “the audience [at the premiere] could have been substantially larger.”¹⁴ Attendance at the second performance was even more problematic, as the *Chicago Tribune*’s Frederick Donaghey explained: “[O]n the first repetition of Mr. Hadley’s piece in Chicago, interest in native talent was expressed in the purchase of five main-floor seats. That is, the number of seats sold for the second performance was just five in excess of the number in use by subscribers on that night.”¹⁵ Lawrence Gilman, in what is otherwise an overwhelmingly positive, article-length

¹¹ Karleton Hackett, writing for the *Chicago Post*, quoted in “The First Genuinely All-American Operatic Production,” *Current Opinion* 64, no. 2 (February 1918): 103; and “Hadley’s *Azora* Sung,” *New York Times*, 30 December 1917.

¹² Grenville Vernon, “The Chicago Opera Association Presents *Azora*, a New Work by Americans,” *New York Tribune*, 28 January 1918. These comments are taken from a review that is lukewarm at best.

¹³ “Hadley’s *Azora* Given,” *New York Times*, 28 January 1918.

¹⁴ “Hadley’s *Azora* Sung,” *New York Times*, 30 December 1917.

¹⁵ Frederick Donaghey, “Words About the Opera,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 January 1919. Also see Robert C. Marsh, and Norman Pellegrini, *150 Years of Opera in Chicago* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press,

review of the Chicago Opera Company's New York tour, hints at the fate of Hadley's work principally through what remains unsaid. Although he finds it "commendable" that the company would "go to the very considerable trouble of mounting *Azora*—if mediocre operas *must* be given merely because they are American," he ultimately restrains himself, announcing, "we are not going to discuss *Azora*; for we prefer to conclude this thank-offering to the Chicago Opera Company upon a note of unsullied gratitude."¹⁶ Although the opera would never be staged again, Hadley, in his role as conductor, did manage to resuscitate the most popular orchestral passages. The grand processional for the "Entrance of Montezuma" and the Act III Prelude became staples of Hadley's repertory throughout the 1920s. Other conductors too were soon programming these numbers in concert and on radio broadcasts. Excerpts even found their way into silent film accompaniments.¹⁷ Any memory of the opera itself was quickly overshadowed by Hadley's more prestigious Metropolitan Opera premiere, *Cleopatra's Night*, which received nine performances during the 1920–21 season. For both Hadley and Converse, the "embalming" seems to have begun shortly after their operas' premieres.

The premiere production of *Narcissa* (22 April 1912) was of similarly regional significance to the staging of *The Sacrifice* in Boston, Converse's hometown. Mary Carr Moore likewise called Seattle home in the early 1910s. Uniquely, of the six operas examined here, *Narcissa* was the only one presented by an ad hoc collection of singers and musicians rather than by a full-time professional opera company, but this in no way hindered the enthusiasm of the

2006), 80. The dates for *Azora*'s three Chicago performances are 26 December 1917, 7 and 12 January 1918; see *ibid.*, 266.

¹⁶ Lawrence Gilman, "The Chicago Opera Company and Its Memorable Singing and Acting," *The North American Review* 207 (March 1918): 445.

¹⁷ For a news report detailing the music selected to accompany the film *Nero* (J. Gordon Edwards, 1922), including selections from *Azora*, see "Big Orchestra for *Nero*," *Washington Post*, 12 November 1922.

local audience. Keeping with the pattern, the opera's attendees seemed thrilled to be a part of this historic event, for *Narcissa* marked the first opera premiered in Seattle and the first American opera by a woman to be conducted by its composer. Paul Hedrick, reporting in the *Seattle Times*, described "a brilliant audience that all but completely filled The Moore [Theater]" and brought a "keen intent and loyal desire to shower honors on Mrs. Carr and her gifted daughter." With local talent in the cast and chorus, including many amateur singers, some performers "appeared to have an individual following. These different sets of friends of members of the cast vied with each other in demonstrations of appreciation and intense interest in their work." But there was no question that Moore deserved the most credit: "At the first moment of Mrs. Moore's appearance, baton in hand, there swept from every part of the house a right royal greeting."¹⁸

The audience was convinced of the work's merits from the start. Hedrick describes how after only the first act, "the house was tingling with interest and enthusiastic enjoyment of the music." He continues:

Then it was that the audience began the gladsome spectacle of bestowing great quantities of floral gifts on the composer, the author and the principals in the cast. Immense bouquets of roses of every hue went across the footlights. Flanked by these beautiful tokens, Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Carr appeared on the stage amid a tumult of applause and cheers.

One might suppose that an audience would expend its energy too soon with such a display, but perhaps this show of support strengthened Moore's confidence as a conductor, a role for which she was relatively inexperienced. Nevertheless, "there was no lessening of the noisy approval, for at the end of the succeeding acts the house was determined to shower its honors on Mrs.

¹⁸ Paul C. Hedrick, "Narcissa Approved By Large Local Audience," *Seattle Daily Times*, 23 April 1912.

Moore and Mrs. Carr, as well as on the principal singers.”¹⁹ While this newspaper writer seems almost distracted by festive atmosphere of the premiere, one must not forget that the opera’s plot enacts a troubling historical tragedy very much at the heart of the audience’s shared cultural memory. The composer herself recalled the impact of her opera:

At each performance after the final curtain, the silence was oppressive for a few seconds. This tragedy is too recent and too real to us of the Northwest to be viewed dispassionately. I, myself, conducting the performances, stepped down from my place softly, feeling as if I were an actual witness of this terrible occurrence.²⁰

Clearly, the audience was completely drawn in by Moore’s powerful realization of this significant chapter in their regions’ history.

Narcissa took the stage four times in this initial run, including one understudy performance featuring local amateur singers in the lead roles.²¹ Already there was talk of a possible production at a more significant operatic center. Paul Hedrick reported, “The fame of *Narcissa* ... is not to die, for interest in the work appears to have been aroused in many quarters. Eastern producers have taken the keenest interest in reports concerning the Seattle production.”²² A thorough review in *Musical America* helped to raise national awareness of Moore’s accomplishment.²³ Following this success and with the manuscript of her full orchestral score in hand, Moore ventured to New York City in 1913 seeking out a producer willing to stage her opera. While there, she encountered Victor Herbert—who, according to Moore’s biographers

¹⁹ Ibid. The *Seattle Times* parallel columnist wrote of “the vast array of floral offerings, the rounds of applause, the endless curtain calls” (see J. Willis Sayre, “Local Grand Opera Heartily Applauded,” *Seattle Daily Times*, 23 April 1912). Sayre’s and Hedrick’s columns appeared side by side on the same page of the newspaper.

²⁰ Mary Carr Moore, “Writing and Producing an Opera,” *Pacific Coast Musician* 4 (July 1915): 51.

²¹ For a review of the understudy performance, see Paul C. Hedrick, “Local Amateurs Score in *Narcissa* Production,” *Seattle Times*, 28 April 1912.

²² Ibid.

²³ Carl Presley, “Historical Opera of the Northwest,” *Musical America* (11 May 1912): 5.

spoke encouragingly of her compositional efforts—and possibly witnessed a performance of *Natoma*.²⁴ Barbara Jean Rogers advances an alternate point of view, in which Moore was “received more as a dilettante than as a serious composer of opera” and aroused only “polite interest on the part of Victor Herbert and John Philip Sousa.”²⁵ Ultimately, she would find but little East Coast potential for a grand opera by an unknown woman composer. Without her unflagging advocacy for the work, *Narcissa* would likely have suffered the same fate as *Azora* and *The Sacrifice*.

Instead, she managed to secure two later revival productions, both of which she again conducted. A 1925 staging in San Francisco, where Moore was then living, coincided with that city’s “Jubilee Week.” As before, there was “sustained interest of the audiences which gathered during the week’s nine performances, tendering their salvos of applause to composer and production alike.” The reviewer Gem Harris praised Moore, recognizing that “With her quiet but persistent hard work together with a great native talent, unusual technical skill and the needed artistic background, she has broken down the traditional idea that profound operatic composition (and its production) belongs preeminently to man.”²⁶ A subsequent Los Angeles mounting in 1945 was less well received. In this third production, Moore was working with what one reviewer described as an “an earnest but inexperienced cast and limited rehearsal time.” The productions greatest fault was its “sameness of tempo. ... Dr. Moore chose to keep the performance on an even keel rather than to indulge in musical histrionics.”²⁷ By 1945, the score

²⁴ Catherine Parsons Smith and Cynthia S. Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore, American Composer* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 85.

²⁵ Barbara Jean Rogers, “The Works for Piano Solo and Piano with Other Instruments of Mary Carr Moore (1873–1957)” (D.M.A. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1992), 11.

²⁶ Gem Harris, “Narcissa,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 83 (October 1925): 380.

²⁷ Isabel Morse Jones, “American Opera Given,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 March 1945.

was more than thirty years old and presented what would have then been seen as a long-outdated compositional style. However, at this point in her career, Moore was a resident of Los Angeles and a well-respected and much-loved area music teacher. In all three productions, community support for a local composer was the deciding factor. In total, Moore conducted *Narcissa* sixteen times.²⁸ However, her advancement of the opera extended far beyond the theater. As an active figure in the West Coast women's music club scene, Moore regularly participated in numerous "readings" of her score in front of small, supportive audiences.²⁹ Thus, *Narcissa* is unique in that much of its audience came from outside of the opera house, but this work also demonstrates that a composer's perseverance can result in broader exposure for an American opera.

Recall, from chapter two, that by the time of *Shanewis*, the press had finally moderated their anticipatory eagerness for the premiere of a new American opera. The expectations placed upon a new work were not so impossibly high, but this did not limit an enthusiastic audience welcome. In *Shanewis*'s initial Metropolitan Opera run, attendees were not only welcoming a new opera, but they were also cheering the success of a young American singer, Sophie Braslau, who had learned the title role at short notice, filling in for the indisposed Alice Gentle. A *New York Times* correspondent described the scene at the premiere (23 March 1918):

[W]hen Sophie Braslau darted on the stage, it was good to hear a New York crowd applaud an American star at sight, then applaud her songs [and] her love duet with Althouse. The two acts of Cadman's opera earned twenty-one curtain calls from the house, all the singers appearing, joined at the third call by Mr. Bamboschek, the pianist in the stage 'concert' and at the seventh by Mr. Cadman. ... After the second act, Conductor Moranzoni was brought out, and twice Mrs. Eberhart, the librettist.³⁰

²⁸ For further discussion of the San Francisco and Los Angeles revivals, see Smith and Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore*, 103–5, 190–3, and 254 n10.

²⁹ For example, see "Composer to Be Paid Honor in Club Affair," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 March 1930.

³⁰ "Shanewis, Indian Opera, Captivates," *New York Times*, 24 March 1918.

This premiere marked the first time that the Met presented the work of an American woman librettist. Tsianina herself was in the audience, and caused quite a stir at intermission when, “by odd coincidence, Tsianina Redfeather, the Indian original of *Shanewis*, walked down an aisle ... and was promptly mistaken for the star” since both were costumed in the same fashion.³¹

While the audience clearly enjoyed Cadman’s new work, the full triple bill (with Henry Gilbert’s ballet *Dance in Place Congo* and Franco Leoni’s *L’Oracolo*) was apparently less satisfactory. One later repetition paired *Shanewis* with Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Le Coq d’Or* and another with Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci*.³² The original triple bill was only reprised once at the end of the Met’s season. In total, the Met offered *Shanewis* five times in its initial performance run. This was an average number of repetitions for a work in the Met’s repertoire. Most operas received four, five, or six performances during the 1917–18 season; only *Carmen* received a seventh.³³

One other “first” is associated with *Shanewis*: it was the first American opera to appear at the Met in two consecutive seasons. In general, however, the significance of this fact has been overstated. Yes, *Shanewis* did receive three additional performances in March and April of 1919, but it provided the necessary completion of an all-American triple bill, alongside Joseph Breil’s *The Legend* and John Hugo’s *The Temple Dancer*. Both were world premieres, but neither new work presented an indigenous plot, setting or characters. Gatti-Casazza intentionally united these three operas to offer an American complement to Puccini’s *Il Trittico*, which had received its

³¹ Ibid.

³² For reviews of these pairings, see “*Shanewis* Pleases Again,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1918; and “*Shanewis* and *Pagliacci* Sung,” *New York Times*, 11 April 1918.

³³ See “This Week to End Opera Season—The Metropolitan Carries Out All Its Plans,” *New York Times*, 14 April 1918, for a summary of the season’s repertoire. *The Dance in Place Congo* also appeared five times in total.

world premiere at the Met earlier that same season.³⁴ Despite its audience popularity, *Shanewis* never entered the company's regular repertoire rotation. The work was next staged in Chicago in both 1922 and 1923 by the American Grand Opera Company and the Opera in Our Language Foundation respectively. As usual, the standard critical trope regarding the relative merits of music versus text is again in place. Edward Moore reviewed both productions in the *Chicago Tribune*. He explained following the second revival, "Here was an opera with much good music in its score and a strange lack of humor in its book, a realistic tale developed with some of the most highfaluting language known in all literature."³⁵

The subsequent performance history of *Shanewis* echoes that of *Narcissa*, since both works received revival productions in cities where the composers had close personal ties. Denver, the city in which Cadman and Tsianina first became acquainted, showed interest in the opera next. For this 1924 production, the composer and librettist Eberhart "reexamined their *Shanewis* in the light of [earlier] criticisms and ... revised Part II by adding nearly twelve pages, including an Indian Dance and a quintet that strengthened the drama," as Arlouine Wu recalled.³⁶ This revised ending improves the dramatic credibility of the opera's conclusion. *Shanewis* now attempts to first placate Philip Harjo's animosity towards Lionel, while additional material helps to clarify both male characters' motivations. The quintet—for Amy, *Shanewis*, Mrs. Everton, Lionel and Philip Harjo—is only two pages long, but it provides a more dramatic lead-in to *Shanewis*'s monologue, from which point on the authors kept the original version intact.

³⁴ "New Native Operas Foreign in Scene," *New York Times*, 9 March 1919.

³⁵ Quote from Edward Moore, "Sunday Music Bills Possess Merit, Variety," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 April 1923; also see Edward Moore, "American Opera Gets Fine Start: *Shanewis* Presented to Large Audience," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 November 1922.

³⁶ Arlouine G. Wu, *Constance Eberhart: A Musical Career in the Age of Cadman*, National Opera Association Monographs Series 4 (Oxford, Miss.: National Opera Association, 1983), 66.

Cadman's publisher replaced the first edition and issued this revised version in piano-vocal score in 1927.³⁷ This Denver production was a small-scale affair, accompanied by an orchestra of only 22 musicians, but this event did provide Tsianina's first opportunity to portray the role she inspired.³⁸

Tsianina would soon reprise her Shanewis in the most lavish mounting the opera would ever receive. In 1926, after the protracted efforts of Cadman's supporters to secure a Los Angeles staging of *Shanewis*, the Hollywood Bowl hosted an elaborate outdoor production that paired the opera with a ballet version of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*. Cadman had been living in Los Angeles for the past ten years. Projected *Shanewis* stagings had been announced before, but finally, as one reporter noted, "this work which Los Angeles ... has enjoyed hearing about for several years and despaired of seeing, is actually being assembled." City residents were grateful for the opportunity to "rally to the support of the first local presentation of a Cadman opera."³⁹ The Hollywood Bowl had recently been renovated and could now seat a capacity crowd of approximately 20,000 people. Taking advantage of the "largest stage in the world"—measuring 150 by 450 feet—the producers sought to achieve "huge pageantry" by interpolating into the powwow scene "an Indian ballet ... arranged especially for this occasion, which was not

³⁷ Cadman and Eberhart, *The Robin Woman (Shanewis): An American Opera*, rev. ed. (Boston: White-Smith Music Publishing Co., 1927). The new material begins on page 101.

³⁸ See Harry D. Perison, "Charles Wakefield Cadman: His Life and Works" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1978), 231.

³⁹ "Shanewis Announced for Bowl: Cadman's Long-Awaited Indian Opera Will Be Staged in June," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 April 1926. As originally planned, Stravinsky's *Petrouschka* was supposed to precede the opera; *Scheherazade* was a later substitution.

part of the performance at the Metropolitan in New York, [and that] will be danced by San Gabriel Indians from the Mission Play [sic].”⁴⁰ Local support and enthusiasm ran high:

Scores of women of Los Angeles and nearby towns have gladly offered their services to sing in the chorus of *Shanewis* as a tribute to the composer. ... Two complete performances are being offered at prices far below what either has brought when given singly in the East. The aim of the civic groups is to bring these productions to the eyes and ears of everyone at a minimum of cost.⁴¹

Although, surely the need to fill a 20,000-seat outdoor amphitheater motivated the accessible pricing as much as civic pride did. The cast consisted entirely of American singers. Oskenton, another Indian operatic voice, fresh off a concert tour of Europe, portrayed the role of Philip Harjo. The Texan tenor Rafaelo Diaz, with the Metropolitan Opera since 1918, sang Lionel. Cadman himself appeared on stage as Shanewis’s piano accompanist in the opera’s first part. Gaetano Merola conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.⁴²

As plans developed, the production team chose to expand the action beyond the confines of the stage itself. In an article detailing the elaborate preparations, Isabel Morse Jones explained how “the magnificent natural beauties” of the landscape surrounding the Hollywood Bowl would impart “an impressiveness far beyond the possibilities of any indoor opera house.” Despite Cadman’s initial stress on the fact that *Shanewis* is not an “Indian opera,” the pageantry of the Hollywood Bowl production drastically shifted the balance in that direction. Jones continued:

⁴⁰ “Plans Laid for Opera *Shanewis*,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 May 1926. Cadman composed new music to accompany this portion of the opera. See “New Cadman Music for Bowl Production,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 June 1926; and “Pageantry to Enhance *Shanewis*,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 June 1926.

⁴¹ “Cadman Opera Support Gains [sic]: Clubs Eagerly Back Musical Project at Bowl,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 June 1926.

⁴² For information on the full cast, see “In Heroine Role of Cadman Opera: Princess Tsianina,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 May 1926. In the days leading up to the premiere, the *Los Angeles Times* profiled each principal cast member: “Indian Songbird [Tsianina] to Be Heard at Bowl: Cherokee Star Here for Opera,” 15 June 1926; “Indian Singer [Oskenton] Here for Opera Role,” 17 June 1926; “Singer [Rafaelo Diaz] Breaks Old Vow,” 22 June 1926. Even the librettist was featured: “Story of Opera *Shanewis* by Nelle Eberhart,” 22 June 1926.

In [*Shanewis*] a parade of Indians will stretch for a quarter of a mile along the crest of the hills. In silhouette these men will file to the stage where a group of 450 will participate in the second act. Campfire and tepees will dot the hillsides. The first act of the Indian opera represents the Santa Monica home where a costume ball is in progress. At least 200 will assemble in this scene. Oskentont, the Indian baritone who sings the role of Philip, will play a prominent part in the inspiring Indian scenes in the hills.

(Note that Santa Monica is only a dozen miles away from the Hollywood Bowl.) Lighting this expanse—“two and one-half acres in area”—required “more than four miles of electric cable.”⁴³

In the history of American opera, never before had the genre received such an elaborate mounting or such popular interest. Tsianina recalled: “To sing the opera in such a superb setting, under the stars, was like the Holy One was talking to me. It was truly my life!”⁴⁴ The Hollywood Bowl production played twice, on 24 and 28 June 1926.

Although this was the opera’s final full-scale professional production, the work certainly did not disappear from view. Elsie Baker had already recorded both of *Shanewis*’s Indian song idealizations in 1925.⁴⁵ NBC’s National Grand Opera Company performed a “tabloid version” (simply a condensed, hour-long abridgement) of the work for radio broadcast in 1928 and 1929.⁴⁶ The fact that *Shanewis* would be broadcast this early in the history of network radio is rather remarkable, as NBC network music programming had only begun in 1926. Into the 1930s, ’40s and ’50s, amateur and opera reading club performances followed, demonstrating the

⁴³ Isabel Morse Jones, “Colorful Pageant Will Usher in Brilliant Season for Bowl: Indian Opera and Oriental Ballet in Enlarged Amphitheater Will Entertain Thousands,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 1926. Also see “Russia and America Contrasted: Themes of East and West Combined in Double Bill,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 June 1926; “Cadman Opera Tonight,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1926; and the photo spread “Final Presentation of *Shanewis* and *Scheherazade* Tonight,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 June 1926.

⁴⁴ Tsianina Blackstone, *Where Trails Have Led Me*, 2nd ed. (Santa Fe, N.M.: Vergara Printing Co., 1970), 125. For Tsianina’s full recollections of the production, including a complete telling of the *Shanewis* plot in her own words, see 123–9. Also see Perison, “Charles Wakefield Cadman,” 233–6. News of the production also reached the East coast: see “Cadman’s *Shanewis* Pleases Hollywood,” *New York Times*, 26 June 1926.

⁴⁵ Both are available on the CD *Souvenirs from American Opera*.

⁴⁶ See “WRC Will Broadcast American Indian Opera,” *Washington Post*, 9 May 1928; and “*Shanewis* To Be Given Over WRC,” *Washington Post*, 7 January 1929.

continued accessibility and popularity of the score throughout the nation.⁴⁷ In 1955, the Inspiration Point Opera Workshop in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, began what eventually expanded into a full scale “Cadman Festival” in 1958. With the involvement of Constance Eberhart, daughter of Cadman’s librettist and herself a professional opera singer, this Festival for young musicians and singers first staged *Shanewis* but later worked on all three of the composer’s published operas.⁴⁸ The last known public performance was a workshop reading with piano accompaniment presented by the Central City Opera (Colorado) in 1979, which had *New Yorker* music critic Andrew Porter convinced that “*Shanewis* could, I think, easily bear a full professional revival.”⁴⁹ As recently as 1991, the work was still on commentator David Wright’s mind, who observed, “If audiences are packing the theaters to see *Dances with Wolves*, why shouldn’t they do likewise for a revival of Charles Wakefield Cadman’s *Shanewis*?”⁵⁰

Perhaps only Herbert’s *Natoma* played in front of more people than *Shanewis*. Both works, according to Edward Hipsher, shared a quality of approachability unique among their contemporaries:

[T]he composers of Italy, the land and home of opera and song, have written for the stage persistently in a vein and idiom which the *people* (not the musically cultured alone) could understand and appreciate. *Shanewis* and *Natoma*, among American operas, are guiding lights in this direction.⁵¹

⁴⁷ See, for instance, “Amateurs Give Opera: Westchester Singers Are Heard in ... *Shanewis*,” *New York Times*, 3 February 1935; “Charles W. Cadman Opera Staged by Euterpe Club,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 December 1942; and “Opera *Shanewis* to Be Presented Today and Friday,” *Washington Post*, 5 June 1952.

⁴⁸ See Marge Lyon, “Ozarks Area Gets in Tune with Young Music Colony,” *Chicago Tribune*, 30 January 1955; and Perison, “Charles Wakefield Cadman,” 412–3.

⁴⁹ Andrew Porter, “Musical Events: Singtime in the Rockies,” *The New Yorker* (27 August 1979): 83.

⁵⁰ David Wright, “North of the Border,” *Chamber Music* 8, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 9.

⁵¹ Edward Ellsworth Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1927), 18.

Of the six works examined here, only *Natoma* ever came close to earning what might be considered a place in the standard performance repertoire, if only briefly.⁵² Its on-stage beginnings, however, were not so auspicious. At the world premiere in Philadelphia (25 February 1911), the reception was decidedly mixed. The reorganization of Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company technically resulted in a joint Chicago-Philadelphia venture, but Philadelphians responded coldly to what they considered to be a Chicago-only opera company. Glenn Dillard Gunn explained:

Philadelphia's share in the company seems limited to the name alone. The public will have none of it, or so little that the financial losses will be great. Evidently there are even fewer music lovers in Philadelphia than in Chicago, for one is justified in estimating lightly the musical culture of people who will deprive themselves of worthy art merely because they are obliged to share it with another city.⁵³

Natoma did at least manage to draw a full house, and, as one reported described, "there was evident a very real interest and curiosity in the new work." The first act ended with "positive excitement" and many curtain calls for cast, composer, and librettist, but following the second act, "the audience was curiously apathetic."⁵⁴ Thus, *Natoma*'s world premiere was, in effect, more like an out-of-town tryout.

The New York premiere at the Metropolitan Opera House (28 February 1911) instead provided the sort of gala opening that typically greeted a new American opera. Following what one reporter described as "an enormous amount of preliminary heralding and puffery," the audience was primed to expect a great event, even though the Met had already hosted the

⁵² The data presented in Appendix D (which examines books of opera plot synopses) supports this assertion.

⁵³ Gunn saw this as "another manifestation of the typical eastern attitude toward the American nation as a whole, which is habitually one of self-interest and contempt." See Glenn Dillard Gunn, "Can It Be that Sleepy Philadelphia Is Jealous of Vigorous Chicago? Or Does Its Musical Public Lack a Proper Artistic Discrimination?" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 February 1911.

⁵⁴ "American Opera, *Natoma*, Produced," *New York Times*, 26 February 1911. The identical report appeared as "East First Hears American Opera" in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.

premieres of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* and Humperdinck's *Königskinder* the previous December.⁵⁵ Despite those earlier premieres, the nationalist undercurrents of *Natoma*'s arrival invited a most festive atmosphere. One observer detailed how the "American flag between the shields of New York and California ... formed the decorative scheme, its presence at the Metropolitan being unusual."⁵⁶ Another remarked upon how "inside the house presented as gay an aspect as it has any time this season."⁵⁷ Even Arthur Farwell, alongside his detailed musical commentary, chose to describe the spectacle:

The Metropolitan Opera House wore festive and appropriate garb on the occasion of the first New York performance. American flags were draped on the boxes, the occupants of which arrived at an earlier hour than is customary for those who usually go late and depart early for after-theater suppers.⁵⁸

Even as the opera was underway, ticket speculators outside the opera house were still selling balcony seats for up to \$5 apiece, a sum greater than \$110 when adjusted for inflation today. This eager and attentive audience rewarded *Natoma* with numerous curtain calls and demands for encores. Unlike the earlier Philadelphia premiere, in New York enthusiasm peaked after the second act, as the *New York Times* reported:

The finale of the second act with its sensational dagger dance was the signal for renewed applause. There were fourteen calls after this act. ... After the principals had bowed several times Miss Garden made a dive into the wings and presently returned with Mr. Herbert and Mr. Redding. Subsequently Mr. Dipple [manager of the Chicago Opera Company] appeared, and Mr Campanini [conductor] and Mr. Almanz, the stage director. All of these were deluged with flowers and wreaths. The stage attendants dumped

⁵⁵ "Natoma Greeted By Great Audience," *New York Times*, 1 March 1911.

⁵⁶ "Mayor Hears *Natoma*: Sits in J. P. Morgan's Box as Enthusiasm Rises," *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 March 1911.

⁵⁷ "Natoma Greeted By Great Audience," *New York Times*, 1 March 1911.

⁵⁸ Arthur Farwell, "American Opera on American Themes: Artistic Significance of Herbert's *Natoma* and Converse's *Sacrifice*" *The American Review of Reviews* 43 (1911): 442. The audience's "garb" also received coverage on the *Times* fashion page; see "In the World of Fashion: Premiere of *Natoma*," *New York Times*, 5 March 1911.

quantities of sent pieces on the stage near the footlights. An occupant of a grand tier box threw a bunch of violets and orchids to Miss Garden.

By the opera's conclusion, the audience had apparently exhausted their fervor, for they "seemed wearied and anxious to go."⁵⁹

Critic Henry Krehbiel was predictably dismissive of this public demonstration of enthusiasm for Herbert's new opera. With nine curtain calls at the end of the first act, Krehbiel sarcastically claimed that "the audience burned its powder after the first curtain, thus necessitating the employment of considerable effort and artifice to rekindle a sufficient demonstration" at the end of the second act. He continued:

[J]udging by the number of recalls, the success of the opera was overwhelming. If there were any persons in the house who were not in a transcendental state of joy, it must have been those ... who had not been convinced that Messrs. Redding and Herbert had solved a great problem, or that a monumental work of art had been sent down the ways into the ocean of lasting popularity.⁶⁰

Clearly, Krehbiel counted himself among those "who had not been convinced," arguing at length in his *Tribune* review against the absurdities of Redding's plot and lyrics even as he begrudgingly complimented parts of Herbert's music.⁶¹ Audiences at the time, however, seemed not to be bothered by such critical displeasure. Public enthusiasm again surged for the Chicago premiere the following season (15 December 1911). Glenn Dillard Gunn described the work's reception:

The public testified to its conviction by the most genuine and spontaneous enthusiasm that the season has developed.... There were ten curtain calls after the first act of Miss Garden and her associates in the cast, and the composer. Three numbers in the second act had to be repeated, and there remained enthusiasm enough for another half dozen curtain

⁵⁹ "Natoma Greeted By Great Audience," *New York Times*, 1 March 1911.

⁶⁰ Henry Edward Krehbiel, *More Chapters of Opera* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), 227.

⁶¹ Henry Krehbiel, "Natoma at the Metropolitan Opera House: Much Ado about a New Opera," *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 March 1911. Krehbiel incorporated a revised version of this review into *More Chapters of Opera*. Also see my discussion of Krehbiel's plot commentary in chapter three.

calls. The beauties of the last act were received with that close and breathless attention that is the highest compliment the 'sounding arts' can command.⁶²

At a later performance, Gunn noted that "for the first time this week the Auditorium was filled."⁶³ Both reports suggest that, in the opera-going public's view at least, *Natoma* was a season favorite.

The opera's highlights, both vocal and orchestral, quickly entered the concert and recital repertory and appeared on innumerable programs. Both the Columbia and Victor record companies recorded many of these selections, often in competing versions, although John McCormack was the only original cast member to issue any material from the work.⁶⁴ The Chicago Opera Company kept the initial production of *Natoma* in its repertoire for three seasons and presented the work on tour, including a 1912 "gala open air performance" at Santa Barbara, the locale in which the opera is set.⁶⁵ By the time the work reached Los Angeles in 1913, the opera's reputation had clearly preceded it. As Hector Alliot reported, "A vast throng ... occupied every seat of the Auditorium and overflowed into the foyer." This performance was so popular that the company responded "to the overwhelming success and extraordinary demand for a repetition" by adding a second L.A. performance. Remarkably, this extra *Natoma* replaced a previously scheduled *Carmen*, of all things.⁶⁶ Back in Chicago, the company celebrated its 30th

⁶² Glenn Dillard Gunn, "Herbert's Opera, *Natoma*, in First Chicago Hearing," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 December 1911. Both Paul's "Ode to Columbus" and Barbara's "Spring Song" received encores; Gunn's report does not name the third encored number.

⁶³ Glenn Dillard Gunn, "*Natoma* Heard Again," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 December 1911.

⁶⁴ McCormack recorded an especially thrilling account of Paul's "Ode to Columbus" in 1912. Four of the Victor sides, including McCormack's, are included on the CD *Souvenirs from American Operas*. See the liner notes, pages 2–4, for information on other recordings.

⁶⁵ See "Music for the Week," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 April 1912. Other stops for *Natoma* on the company's tours included Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Paul, and San Francisco. See Edward N. Waters, *Victor Herbert: A Life in Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 390.

⁶⁶ Hector Alliot, "*Natoma* Opera a Triumph," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 March 1913.

and final performance of the work's initial run by inviting the composer himself to conduct the opera for his first time.⁶⁷

The following year, *Natoma* was back on the stage in New York in a new production by the Aborn Company at the Century Opera House. Frank Preisch, the original Jose Castro, reprised his role in this revival with an otherwise all new cast.⁶⁸ Apparently, the New York public's interest in the work had already dwindled, for as the *Times* reported, "the audience was a small one and only occasionally roused to polite applause."⁶⁹ Revisiting the usual critical trope, this unnamed writer (but likely Richard Aldrich) complained of the "singularly weak and conventional" libretto, in which "the lyrics are in the most hopelessly conventional operatic style of the bad old kind; constructed on Voltaire's theory that what is too foolish to be spoken is appropriate to be sung."⁷⁰ Of greater interest is the fact that this production hosted a sizable delegation of actual American-Indians at one performance, including the Sioux chief, Iron Tail, famous as the model for the heads side of the Buffalo Nickel. At intermission, the chief went backstage where, as the *Times* reported, he was "introduced to Beatrice La Palme, who was singing the title role in the opera. Chief Iron Tail presented her with a new nickel bearing his likeness, a souvenir which he was lavish in distributing to all the women singers." The opera company management had "decided to try [*Natoma*] on real Indians ... and they seemed to enjoy

⁶⁷ Glenn Dillard Gunn, "First of Series of English Operas," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 November 1913; also see Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 390. Mary Garden appeared in the title role 22 times. Her biographer noted, "Heightened realism had its penalties. In Baltimore Mary was slightly wounded during the Dagger Dance" when she slipped and cut her arm with the blade. See Michael T. R. B. Turnbull, *Mary Garden*, Opera Biography Series 8 (Portland, Ore.: Amadeus Press, 1997), 87 and 204.

⁶⁸ For full casting details, see "Century Opera House," *New York Times*, 12 April 1914.

⁶⁹ "*Natoma* at the Century," *New York Times*, 14 April 1914. Audiences at the beginning of the company's season were in general much larger, including some sold out nights. Richard Aldrich speculated that the public had "gradually come to feel that the Century standard was not high enough; that it was not so high as it might be made; and that interest was lost in part for this reason." See Richard Aldrich, "The Century Company's Season—Record of the Undertaking to Give Popular Performances in English," *New York Times*, 19 April 1914.

⁷⁰ "*Natoma* at the Century," *New York Times*, 14 April 1914.

it very much.”⁷¹ However, given the Century Opera Company’s dwindling audience size, this was surely more of a publicity stunt than it was a significant cross-cultural encounter.

While *Natoma*’s reputation faded in New York, it continued to thrive in Chicago. In 1916, Herbert was back in town to conduct both this work and the Chicago premiere of his second opera, *Madeleine*. One reporter remarked of these performances, “A fiscal tradition of the theater is that Mr. Herbert’s presence in the musician’s pen is a selling argument at the box office.”⁷² *Natoma* was revived again in 1922 as part of the first season of the now reorganized Chicago Civic Opera Company.⁷³ Ever planning for the continued success of his work, the composer was beginning to consider revisions to the score when he unexpectedly passed away in 1924.⁷⁴ A 1935 radio broadcast of an abridged *Natoma* introduced the score’s highlights to younger listeners, while by this time the “Dagger Dance” had already earned its status as a ubiquitous example of “Indian music.”⁷⁵ The only recent outing for *Natoma* occurred in August 2000, when the summer festival at the White Barn Theater in Westport, Connecticut, presented a semi-staged, piano-accompanied reading of the score.⁷⁶ Despite the opera’s limited recent performance history, *Natoma* well deserves its unique position as the most widely exposed American opera of the period.

⁷¹ “Papoose Howls at Opera,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1914.

⁷² “Opera, Recitals, Etc.,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 October 1916.

⁷³ See the associated press item, “Opera in Chicago Will Open Tonight,” *Washington Post*, 12 November 1922.

⁷⁴ Rosemary Gainer speculates that *Natoma* might have emerged “as an operetta with a dramatic theme;” see “*Natoma*, by Victor Herbert: An American ‘Grand’ Opera?” *Opera Journal* 29, no. 4 (1996): 20. Alternatively, I would suggest that, given Herbert’s pride in having accomplished a full-scale grand opera and given the work’s success with the general public, perhaps his revisions would have tightened the opera’s structure and improved upon some of Redding’s weakest text, thus addressing the key concerns of his critics.

⁷⁵ See “On the Air Today,” *Washington Post*, 30 August 1935.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of conductor Glen Clugston’s involvement in this project, see Peg Bryan, “The First Truly American Opera,” *Music Clubs Magazine* 86, no. 3 (2007): 22–3.

From the most widely attended work of the group to the least, the stage life of Nevin's *Poia* during the twentieth century consisted entirely of one single production in Berlin that ran for four performances. The reception of the work's earlier unstaged performances, however, fit the usual pattern for a new American opera. The Pittsburgh concert reading "was made a social event and the production was enthusiastically received."⁷⁷ The audience at the subsequent White House "illustrative lecture" included several cabinet members, Supreme Court justices, military leaders, and members of the diplomatic corps, in addition to the President and First Lady.⁷⁸ The Berlin staging should have been the culmination of Nevin's operatic efforts, were it not for the fiasco at the premiere. In chapter two, we encountered the controversies and rumors in circulation before these performances—questions of Nevin's competence as a composer and the validity of the Berlin Royal Opera's decision to mount the work. Such a highly charged atmosphere of anticipation and antagonism naturally resulted in an array of divergent reactions to what, in Berlin, was the premiere of a foreign work (23 April 1910). The performing artists themselves were nothing less than professional and committed to the success of the new production. Nevin recalled how, "from the first to the last, they [the members of the Berlin Royal Opera] were all extremely kind to me, and offered me help and encouragement in every way, as well as expressing appreciation of my work."⁷⁹ Many of the spectators seemed impressed with the work too. As one reporter described, *Poia* "was applauded generously by the audience. Mr. Nevin and Randolph Hartley ... were called out five times at the end of the second act and eight times at the end of the opera." Much of this warmth was surely fueled by the "many American

⁷⁷ "An Indian Grand Opera," *New York Times*, 17 January 1907.

⁷⁸ "Unique Musical Entertainment Given at White House," *Washington Post*, 24 April 1907. This event is discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

⁷⁹ "Explains Berlin's Attack upon Poia," *Musical America* 12, no. 2 (21 May 1910): 25.

residents in Berlin” who came out in support of an opera from their homeland.⁸⁰ The audience included the U. S. ambassador to Germany and his wife, embassy staff, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Vanderbilt, members of the international diplomatic corps, and even some of their children. The manager of the Royal Opera at Dresden also attended, no doubt scouting the new work’s prospects.

There was, however one significant blemish in what would otherwise have been an unqualified success. As the *New York Tribune* correspondent noted, “There was some hissing, but that is always the case in new productions at the Royal Opera, and it was not so marked as at *Elektra*.”⁸¹ Nevin’s more conservative compositional language permitted none of the modernist excesses found in Richard Strauss’s recent work, and thus the reviewer seems content to dismiss this apparently limited show of disapproval. However, the *New York Times* account of the same scene paints a completely different picture:

For ten minutes the auditorium rocked with the most remarkable counter demonstrations of approval and disapproval a Berlin premiere has ever evoked. If the volume of cheers and applause which swept through the house is any criterion, *Poia* scored an unmistakable success, but mingled with patriotic plaudits from the predominant American section of the audience was a storm of hisses which indicated that opinion on the opera’s merits was divided.

Nevin and his librettist, Randolph Hartley, were called before the curtain a half-dozen times, and as the German ‘booing’ increased American enthusiasm waxed still fiercer, till the native protestants retired muttering imprecations on American self-appreciation in the realm of operatic art.⁸²

Likely, this *Times* writer hoped to inflame his readers’ feelings of offense by highlighting the anti-American elements in the audience, but his telling seems closer to the truth than the *Tribune*’s more measured reporting. Nevin himself recalled, “the applause was genuine in all

⁸⁰ “*Poia* Given in Berlin,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 24 April 1910.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “Greet *Poia* with Cheers and Hisses,” *New York Times*, 24 April 1910.

parts of the house, but it was mingled with organized hissing and whistling in the gallery. The students, not content with whistling with their mouths, had enormous door keys, which they blew into with great gusto.”⁸³ In another interview, Nevin described that “it sounded like steam whistles. ... It produced a terrible noise, and I was thunderstruck. Nothing like it was ever heard in Berlin, I believe.”⁸⁴ London’s *Musical Times*, a source unbiased by any national interest in the controversy, allowed little space for comment on the premiere but does confirm these reports, noting that “the performance resulted in scenes of a kind which have fortunately not been experienced in any German opera house for many years.”⁸⁵

Apparently, the German papers savaged Nevin’s opera the following morning. The American press described how *Poia* received “a torrent of personal abuse heaped upon its authors and unfair statements that left no room for honest or fair dealing,” and cautioned that the “omniscient Berlin critics ... [have] long hankered after an opportunity to vent their pent-up spleen.”⁸⁶ *Poia*’s immediate reception in Berlin must have seemed a crushing blow to the young composer. Nevin’s supporters were quick to offer their reassurances. *Musical America* reported, “The day after the *Poia* premiere, while the storm of adverse criticism and abuse was running high, Herr Humperdinck [Nevin’s teacher and mentor] went all the way from his home in Grunewald to tell Mr. Nevin not to mind what was being said, but to go ahead with his next

⁸³ “Composer of *Poia* Mild to Germans,” *New York Times*, 11 May 1910.

⁸⁴ “Explains Berlin’s Attack upon *Poia*,” *Musical America*, 25.

⁸⁵ “Foreign Notes: Berlin,” *The Musical Times* 51 (1910): 393.

⁸⁶ “Explains Berlin’s Attack upon *Poia*,” *Musical America*, 25; and “*Poia* Denounced by Berlin Critics,” *New York Times*, 25 April 1910. The *Times* reporter added that “Richard Strauss has always enjoyed [critical] disfavor [in Berlin], and it was a foregone conclusion that no ‘mere American’ could ever escape it.”

opera.”⁸⁷ Likewise, in a telegram addressed to “Herr Arthur Nevin, Komponist” from “Randolph Hartley, Dichter,” the librettist sent this charming poem in hopes of lifting Nevin’s spirits:

They’ve roasted us in New Rochelle.
They’ve roasted us in Troy.
They’ve roasted us full long and well
In many States, my boy.
And in the gravy of the roasts,
We’ve paddled on to win
A royal roasting from our hosts
In critical Berlin.
Methinks our hope is this, my boy,
Since nothing goes to waste,
That if they roast us long enough,
They’ll get us to their taste.⁸⁸

Nevin soon returned to the United States, unsure if his opera had succeeded or not. He told an interviewer, “I can hardly answer [if the work was a success] because the attacks made upon me so unexpectedly upset me so much that I hardly knew where I stood.”⁸⁹ However, the context of the full performance run does reveal some clues. *Poia* played four times within a six-day period, as originally scheduled, before the theater closed for planned renovations. The Crown Prince and Princess, along with his younger brother and sister-in-law, attended the second performance, while *Poia*’s closing night was “broadcast” via telephone to the Imperial Palace so that the Emperor and Empress could hear the work for themselves.⁹⁰ Had the opera been an actual failure, the Royal Opera could easily have cancelled subsequent performances and replaced *Poia* with a more popular opera from the company’s repertoire. The fact that they did

⁸⁷ “Explains Berlin’s Attack upon Poia,” *Musical America*, 25.

⁸⁸ The telegram was reprinted in “Poem Speeds Home Composer of *Poia*,” *New York Times*, 8 May 1910.

⁸⁹ “Composer of *Poia* Mild to Germans,” *New York Times*, 11 May 1910.

⁹⁰ See “*Poia* Denounced by Berlin Critics,” *New York Times*, 25 April 1910; and “Composer of *Poia* Mild to Germans,” *New York Times*, 11 May 1910.

not do so suggests that public support for—or at least interest in—the work justified its further appearances.

If *Poia* was in fact popular with much of the opera-going public, as the evidence would suggest, then what accounts for the negativity directed towards the work? The composer and the American press presented one possible explanation. Nevin remarked, “I believe that the strong anti-foreign sentiment in Germany, particularly the jealousy of American singers, had something to do with the fate of the opera.”⁹¹ A *New York Times* writer echoed the same opinion, explaining that the attacks were “intended primarily as a concerted demonstration against the ‘Americanization’ of the Kaiser’s operatic stage, and only incidentally as condemnation of the first American opera introduced in Europe.”⁹² Another commentator suggested that *Poia* was “hissed by chauvinists, who resented the choice of a work by an American when so many homemade scores were awaiting production.”⁹³ As chapter two described, the increasing American presence at the Berlin Opera was indeed a legitimate concern of German nationalists who disapproved of seeing lead roles assigned to foreign singers. It would seem as if Nevin, unwittingly, pushed the situation beyond the tipping point. For those opposed to how *their* opera house was becoming a more international venue, the production of an untried American work was the last straw. A concerted show of displeasure at the premiere, driven by the horrible sound of door key whistling, followed by a critical shellacking in the next morning’s press, was the direct result.

This overseas reaction, naturally, made “many Americans anxious to hear the work.” As the *Rochester Post-Express* observed, “That way salvation lies. Why should we take our musical

⁹¹ “Explains Berlin’s Attack upon Poia,” *Musical America*, 25.

⁹² “*Poia* Denounced by Berlin Critics,” *New York Times*, 25 April 1910.

⁹³ “Opera in English,” *The Independent* 70 (23 February 1911): 400.

opinions second hand? Why not think for ourselves?”⁹⁴ Unfortunately, the proponents of national opera in this country would never get that chance. A lecture-recital demonstration of excerpts from *Poia* played at the piano by one Mrs. Mignon Lamasure in 1914 marked the work’s final public appearance during the twentieth century.⁹⁵ Nevin instead turned his attention to his next opera, as Humperdinck had advised, eventually conducting the premiere of *A Daughter of the Forest* at the Chicago Opera Company on 5 January 1918, just ten days after the company’s first performance of Hadley’s *Azora*. Nevin appeared in uniform—during the war he was a band leader at Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois—and his new work elicited “much patriotic applause” and numerous curtain calls.⁹⁶ *Poia* was virtually forgotten. In 1955, Nicolas Slonimsky discussed the work in his regular “Musical Oddities” column for *The Etude*, focusing on the work’s scandalous reception and reminding his readers not to overlook Arthur in favor of the more famous Ethelbert.⁹⁷ More than any of these operas, it did indeed seem as if Nevin’s *Poia* had been “embalmed, congealed, or mummified,” to return to the words of Gilbert Chase with which this chapter began—that is, until the dawn of the current century.

Sometime in the late 1990s, a retired Montana cattle rancher named Sherm Ewing first came across mention of the work in McClintock’s *Old North Trail*. He discussed this with his friend, Gordon Johnson, conductor of the Great Falls Symphony Orchestra, who, after spending time with the score at the piano, was convinced of the opera’s merits. He was intrigued by the possibility of staging the opera in the state where its plot is set. The approaching bicentennial of

⁹⁴ Quoted in “America’s First Assault upon Berlin,” *Current Literature* 48, no. 6 (June 1910): 659. This article is notable for its pervasive use of war imagery. It presented *Poia* as “the first telling shot in what may become ... one of the greatest wars in the history of music.”

⁹⁵ See J. MacB., “American Opera Her Topic: Mrs. Lamasure Gives Interesting Lecture,” *Washington Post*, 20 December 1914.

⁹⁶ For a report on the premiere, see “Nevin’s Wartime Opera,” *New York Times*, 13 January 1918.

⁹⁷ See Nicolas Slonimsky, “Musical Oddities,” *The Etude* 73, no. 8 (August 1955): 4.

the Lewis and Clark Expedition provided the impetus to mount a full production. In 2002, the planning committee accepted Johnson's proposal to present the opera as the cultural centerpiece of the "2005 Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Celebration Signature Event" in Great Falls. (Great Falls is home to the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center.) Armed with an \$80,000 budget, Johnson was on his way towards conducting the only full production of any of these operas to have yet occurred this century.⁹⁸

Johnson first introduced the Great Falls audience—admittedly not an operatically informed one—to selections from the work in concert (6 March 2004), including several of the title character's arias, sung by tenor Scott Piper, and the complete music for the "Ballet of the Four Seasons." The ballet was eventually cut from the stage production, but the libretto underwent more significant changes. Anne Basinski, voice professor at the University of Montana, revised Hartley's text in an effort to remove the most flagrant examples of "operese." The full production ran twice: first, a so-called V.I.P. preview performance on 30 June 2005, followed by a public performance on July 3.⁹⁹ Although a combined audience of fewer than 1400 people attended *Poia*'s two appearances, this unique exception in the history of these American operas again highlights one consistent feature of their overall reception: each opera found the warmest welcome when the host venue had a direct, personal connection to either the work or the composer.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ This background information summarized from Joe Ashbrook Nickell, "Rancher's Burden of Dreams: Staging Opera about Blackfeet," *New York Times*, 2 July 2005.

⁹⁹ For full cast and production information, and a combined review/preview, see Richard Ecke, "Blackfeet Opera Well Done," *Great Falls Tribune*, 2 July 2005. Special thanks to Anne Basinski and Gordon Johnson for providing me with a copy of the revised libretto, a recording the concert of *Poia* excerpts, and a DVD of the complete opera.

¹⁰⁰ Specifically, the two performances drew audiences of 677 and 644 people respectively. Attendance figures given in "Success of 'Explore the Big Sky' Measured by More than Money," *Great Falls Tribune*, 18 June 2006.

Ultimately, this fact reveals perhaps the most compelling clue as to why the historiography of American music has neglected these operas. Their greatest successes came not necessarily because of the merits of the work itself, but because performances were significant events in the cultural life of a community. Music history generally privileges the work over the event, but with these operas in particular, the two are inextricably bound together. The published scores alone—the notes on the page—do not reveal anything about the excitement of witnessing an opera’s premiere. Only when one examines both facets together, as I have attempted to do in this dissertation, does a fuller picture begin to emerge. Only by understanding the event does it become clear that each of these operas indeed represents an important moment in the nation’s musical history.

Final Thoughts

Even in a study of this length, some stones remain unturned. One topic that surely warrants further research is a comparison between the American scene and the contemporary situation for opera in Great Britain. National traditions of late Romantic opera were developing in both countries more or less contemporaneously.¹⁰¹ Both nations approached opera as an imported genre. The debate over performing foreign scores in English translation rather than in the original language raged in England much as it did in the United States. Indigenously composed works in lighter genres like operetta and comic opera flourished, while the composition of new, serious “grand operas” remained an infrequent occurrence. Yet unlike in America, Nicholas Temperley suggests that England was “a nation with a powerful school of drama, where music enjoyed an established but subordinate place” and thus it “tended to resist

¹⁰¹ For a thorough history of the genre in Great Britain, see Eric Walter White, *A History of English Opera* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983).

encroachments from a form in which it seemed that dramatic truth was so readily sacrificed to musical ends.”¹⁰²

The reception of Arthur Sullivan’s *Ivanhoe* (1891) presages the pattern illustrated in these later American works. Public enthusiasm for the event—the chance to attend an English opera by the nation’s most popular composer—could not overcome perceived weaknesses in the quality of the work itself. Critical expectations were set higher than could be realized, and the libretto received most of the blame.¹⁰³ Overall, an account of *Ivanhoe* is strikingly similar to that of *Natoma*, almost as if history were repeating itself across the Atlantic two decades later.

In much the same way as their American counterparts, English composers too struggled to come to terms with the legacy of Wagner and the European repertoire. Charles Villiers Stanford, Frederick Delius, Ethel Smyth, and Joseph Holbrooke are among the more prominent English opera writers active around the turn of the century, whose works illustrate English solutions to the same problems faced by American composers.¹⁰⁴ Yet finding fewer opportunities at home than their American contemporaries, many followed Nevin’s approach and sought performances on the continent. Like American librettists, English writers too struggled to establish a suitable style of sung English for use in operas. Delius offers a particularly intriguing

¹⁰² Nicholas Temperley, “Great Britain,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, from *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com>. Also see Temperley, “Musical Nationalism in English Romantic Opera,” in *The Lost Chord: Essays on Victorian Music*, ed. Nicholas Temperley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 143–57.

¹⁰³ Summarized from W. Johnson Galloway’s 1902 recollections of *Ivanhoe*’s reception; quoted in White, *A History of English Opera*, 325–6. For more on this work, see Andrew Lamb, “*Ivanhoe* and the Royal English Opera,” *The Musical Times* 114 (1973): 475–8.

¹⁰⁴ For an overview of these and other contemporaries, see White, *A History of English Opera*, 335–64. Other pertinent studies include Paul Rodmell, “A Tale of Two Operas: Stanford’s *Savonarola* and *The Canterbury Pilgrims* from Gestation to Production,” *Music & Letters* 78 (1997): 77–91; Christopher Redwood, “Delius in the Opera House,” *The Musical Times* 125 (1984): 319–21; Suzanne Robinson, “Smyth the Anarchist: *fin-de-siècle* Radicalism in *The Wreckers*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 20 (2008): 149–79; and Anne-Marie H. Forbes, “Josef Holbrooke’s *Cauldron of Annwn* and Metempsychosis in Music,” *Musicology Australia* 17 (1994): 43–59.

comparison. His little-known early opera *The Magic Fountain*, composed in 1893–95 to his own libretto but not performed during the composer’s lifetime, anticipates by more than a decade the historical American setting and Indian characters to which later American composers would turn. As these tantalizing suggestions make clear, scholars of American opera would do well to pursue these stylistic connections and parallel trends in greater detail.

Building upon my work in this dissertation, further research needs follow two complimentary paths. One is an issue of depth. Whereas this study has sought connections between six different operas, each one of these works surely warrants the kind of detailed interpretation and analysis more regularly accorded to the established canonical masterpieces. While a few individual studies already provide a foundation, this avenue has only begun to yield up its insights. The second path is an issue of breadth. This project has been limited to six works; additional study should explore how the patterns of consistency identified here apply to or contradict what other opera composers were doing during the same period, especially those scores that treat non-American plots and subject matter. An additional expansion of breadth could also begin to extend my chronological limits beyond the 1910s. The field of American Romantic opera remains one of great potential and infinite possibilities.

When one considers the achievements of these six American composers and librettists, perhaps their most consistently impressive trait is the devotion with which they pursued the challenge of creating an indigenous variety of opera. They developed a style of sung texts that is rooted in a formalized and oftentimes archaic type of English, but enlivened by a detailed characterization of Anglo-American and Indian roles. While their operas’ plots and characters are distinctively New World in origin, they borrowed elements from the canonic repertoire in order to make their works a comfortable fit on the operatic stage. They formed a musical style

that illustrates continuity with European late Romanticism but is localized by the use of Indian musical materials and other specifically American sources. The blending of inherited tradition with indigenous ingredients is the defining feature of the overall soundworld. Indeed, these works are not simply operas written by American composers; they are unquestionably American operas. Critics had yearned for this very phenomenon, and once these works finally appeared on stage, audiences greeted them with warmth and enthusiasm. It would seem as if American opera had indeed come of age.

But could any of these works in fact be an American *National* Opera? Recall Carl Dahlhaus's four characteristics of how a work can be acclaimed as national opera, first encountered in chapter two:

- [1] A national opera usually meets with "instantaneous or at least prompt success."
- [2] Stressing the importance of the "psychological element in the reception," the audience will "identify with the main characters" of a national opera.
- [3] A national opera often makes an effort to "mediate intrinsically between folk song and art music," even though the use of folk music is not obligatory.
- [4] The plot of a national opera was often interpreted as a contemporary "political parable."¹⁰⁵

All of my six selected operas satisfy the first condition, even if their public success was short-lived. The third condition is also a match: Indian, Spanish, and other elements of local color are indeed filtered through the prism of art music. However, the second and fourth conditions are less apparent here. While audiences clearly enjoyed these operas as entertainment, the type of symbolic connections that Dahlhaus expects did not appear to materialize with attendees on either a personal or a political level. While the tragedy of *Narcissa*, for instance, might have been a sorrowful reminder of recent history; while the Christian fervor of *Azora* might have been

¹⁰⁵ This list of characteristics is repeated verbatim from chapter two, as derived from Carl Dahlhaus, "The Idea of National Opera" in *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 219–221.

evangelically inspiring; or while the relationship between Shanewis and Lionel might have enacted a mixture of both romance and tragedy, none of these plot messages were all that pertinent to the contemporary political scene, nor did they promote a sympathetic identification with any of the on-stage characters. Herbert had hoped to create “such a genuine and successful work that it would go all over the world as the output of an American brain and the inspiration of American surroundings”—a hope shared by each of his colleagues.¹⁰⁶ No one seemed to question that these works were in fact the “output” and “inspiration” of Americans, but that did not mean that these operas could necessarily represent the nation as a whole.

Was it even possible for these works to accomplish such a thing in the United States? The inclusion of Indian musical materials and characters soon proved to be a significant hindrance. The tide of Indianism that was at its peak during the 1910s soon turned in the opposite direction. Those nagging criticisms of the use of Indian materials, discussed in chapter four, that at first made up the contrary pole of the debate soon assumed a more central position. Even the composers themselves tired of this approach. While *Natoma* was still at the height of its popularity, Herbert complained, “As to the Indian, I’ve tried him once, and am off him for life! Who cares what happens to one of them, man or maid?”¹⁰⁷ Cadman, too, as John Tasker Howard explained, grew to “resent being known only as an arranger and idealizer of Indian melodies.”¹⁰⁸ In 1926, an unnamed *New York Times* writer summed up the current view of the use of Indian materials:

¹⁰⁶ Interview in the *New York Telegraph*, 8 April 1907, quoted in Rosemary Gainer, “*Natoma*, by Victor Herbert: An American ‘Grand’ Opera?” *Opera Journal* 29, no. 4 (1996): 13.

¹⁰⁷ Herbert quoted in Frederick Donaghey, “Mr. Hadley’s Opera, *Azora*,” *Chicago Tribune*, 27 December, 1917.

¹⁰⁸ John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music: Three Hundred Years of It* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1931), 447.

[I]t is bound to appear in the end that the “music,” so called, of the Indians, has only a minimum of anything that can be found useful or valuable by artistic composers of the present or the future. The chants, the songs, the dances of the Indians are profoundly interesting from many points of view and deserve deep study and careful preservation. But those points of view are anthropological, ethnological, sociological, historical, antiquarian, picturesque—not musical.¹⁰⁹

But perhaps the greatest underlying flaw in the premise that Indian melodies could contribute to an authentically and distinctively American music was an unavoidable one. As Tara Browner explains, “making songs accessible to the general public required changing them to fit into the Western musical system. Thus accessibility contributed to the degradation of authenticity, the very reason composers sought out Native songs in the first place.”¹¹⁰ Ultimately, national opera could clearly not be built upon the music, plot elements, and character types of such a peripheral ethnic group.¹¹¹

Another strand of thinking, emergent in the decades following these opera premieres, advanced the notion that the more distinctively American examples came from the realm of musical theater rather than grand opera. Looking back over the years in which my group of operas came into being, composer Daniel Gregory Mason believed that “our really spontaneous and indigenous works have been such light operettas as were composed a generation ago by Victor Herbert ... and as are being seductively continued in our own day by George

¹⁰⁹ “Indian Music,” *New York Times*, 15 August 1926.

¹¹⁰ Tara Browner, “‘Breathing the Indian Spirit’: Thoughts on Musical Borrowing and the ‘Indianist’ Movement in American Music,” *American Music* 15 (Fall 1997): 279–80.

¹¹¹ This is not to suggest that the genre of Indianist opera completely disappeared after *Shanewis*. H. Earle Johnson’s checklist of “operas on American subjects” includes these six later examples: Francesco De Leone: *Alglala* (1924); Henry Schoenefeld: *Atala; or, The Love of Two Savages* (1924); John Adam Hugo: *The Sun God* (1925); Charles Sanford Skilton: *Kalopin* (1927); E. Bruce Knowlton: *Wakuta* (1928); and Charles Sanford Skilton: *The Sun Bride* (1930). See Johnson, *Operas on American Subjects*, 27–104. A recent example is David Carlson’s *Dreamkeepers* (1996); see Peter Wynne, “Return of the Native: David Carlson’s *Dreamkeepers* Revives a Once-Popular American Opera Theme,” *Opera News* 60, no. 8 (January 1996): 28–9.

Gershwin.”¹¹² Metropolitan Opera chairman Otto Kahn recognized the potential here. In 1924, he tried to interest Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, or George Gershwin in composing a “modern American type” of “jazz opera” for the Met.¹¹³ Cecil Smith too, in a 1941 *Chicago Tribune* article, noted that “nearly all progress toward an indigenous musical theater has been made in the realm of musical comedy, and not of serious grand opera.”¹¹⁴ Albert Goldberg, writing in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1949 went so far as to suggest, “there is the very distinct possibility that the great American opera has sneaked up on us unawares, and quite outside the traditional habitat of opera.”¹¹⁵ For Goldberg, the Rodgers and Hammerstein collaborations might just in fact have achieved what my selection of American operas did not.

In the end, the anti-opera suspicions encountered in chapter one continued to limit the viability of the genre as a central part of national life. Opera could not escape the fact that many Americans found something unnatural and exotic about the entire activity, even if the genre could depend upon an interested audience throughout much of the country. For some observers, the whole venture of opera writing seemed forced, something affected rather than authentic. B.M. Steigman, for instance, ironically observed in 1925, “We do things big in our country, and so, regardless of these limitations, we decided to produce the biggest (that is, the showiest) form

¹¹² Daniel Gregory Mason, *Tune In, America: A Study of Our Coming Musical Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), 3.

¹¹³ “Jazz Opera in View for Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1924. In 1929, Gershwin did accept a Met commission that would remain unfulfilled. By the time *Porgy and Bess* was complete, Otto Kahn was no longer alive to see his hopes for a “modern American type” of “jazz opera” realized.

¹¹⁴ Cecil Smith, “*Cabin in the Sky* Lauded for Its Musical Appeal,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 May 1941.

¹¹⁵ Albert Goldberg, “The Sounding Board: The Great American Opera,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 1949. Each of these three viewpoints hearkens back to Carl Van Vechten’s 1917 observation about the “Great American Composer”: “The most obvious point of superiority of our ragtime composers [e.g., Irving Berlin or George Cohan] (overlooking the fact that their music is pleasanter to listen to) over Messrs. Parker, Chadwick, and Hadley, is that they are expressing the very soul of the epoch while their more serious confreres are struggling to pour into the forms of the past the thoughts of the past, re-arranged, to be sure, but without notable expression of inspiration. They have nothing new to say and no particular reason for saying it.” Carl Van Vechten, “The Great American Composer,” in *Interpreters and Interpretations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), 278.

of music: we decided to have American grand opera.”¹¹⁶ In his opinion, the operas from this period are flawed because they arose not from an artistic compulsion to create, but rather from a conscious “decision” to attempt an impractical form. From this same perspective, Mitzi Kolisch, also writing in 1925, found it perfectly appropriate that these operas would have been “accorded attentive hearing, indulgent performance, and polite burial” but nothing more. After all, she felt that these scores rarely contained anything better than “the most utter sequence of banal noise.”¹¹⁷ Perhaps surprisingly, both of these complainers are in fact staunchly in favor of American opera, just not the style of American opera practiced by this generation of composers.

Indeed, it would appear that the stylistic baseline of all six works examined here—a conservative, tradition-bound, inherited European Romanticism—ultimately prevented their acceptance along nationalist lines. As early as 1911, H. J. Whigham cautioned that “it is far more important to be modern than to be American. Instead of urging American composers to write American operas we should urge them to write modern operas.”¹¹⁸ Describing this generation of composers, Eugene Simpson regretted that “not one has sought the harmonically bizarre or the complex for its own sake. The work of most of them might have come to a better longevity if

¹¹⁶ B. M. Steigman, “The Great American Opera,” *Music and Letters* 6 (1925): 361. Year later, Irving Kolodin still seemed uncomfortable with the grand-opera aspirations of this generation of composers. He felt that American operas are “best when they are nonprenentious, unspectacular, and of modest scope. The grand gesture, the trumpets-on-the-stage of Verdi’s *Aida* are as foreign to our native way of thinking and feeling as Porgy’s ‘Plenty of Nothing’ would be in Tchaikovsky’s *Pique Dame*.” (See Irving Kolodin, “Douglas Moore’s New American Opera,” *Saturday Review* (28 October 1961): 41.) Richard Strauss’s 1925 assessment—that “due to puritan influences, the opera is in America not the core of musical life”—seems both oddly inaccurate and oversimplified. (See “Strauss Raps Our Opera: Sees Puritanism as a Damper,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1925.)

¹¹⁷ Mitzi Kolisch, “Why Not an American Opera?” *The Independent* 115 (15 August 1925): 189. Her article goes on to disparage *Natoma* and *Shanewis*, in particular—comments included in chapters three and four.

¹¹⁸ H. J. Whigham, “Echoes of the Stage,” *Town and Country* (4 March 1911): 24. The context for this quote is a review of *Natoma*.

they had.”¹¹⁹ The desire for American modernity quickly made all of these works seem hopelessly outdated.

However, at the core of this aesthetic shift is an unfortunate irony. These composers intentionally cultivated a style that would help their works to fit comfortably within their present-day’s operatic mainstream. As Appendix A illustrates, today’s performance canon is strikingly similar to what was most popular a century ago. Puccini, Wagner, Verdi, and Bizet remain the central figures. The canonic masterpieces continue to thrive in performance, but American operas from the early twentieth century are all but forgotten. While later commentators faulted these American works for derivativeness, perhaps today’s opera lovers can once again approach these scores on their own terms, without the expectation of originality above all else. Given the continued enthusiasm for attending performances of the core late-Romantic repertoire, one cannot help but wonder if today’s audiences would respond just as warmly to these American operas as did the first attendees a century ago.

Shanewis is likely the opera most able to hold the stage today. Cadman’s consistent tunefulness and fertile melodic imagination, combined with the colorful and varied powwow scene, would surely still impress current audiences. Gaetano Merola, conductor of the Hollywood Bowl revival, offered a pertinent comparison. He declared “that many of his melodies are as fine as those of Puccini and that if Cadman were an Italian, public demand would have forced him to write opera after opera.”¹²⁰ The lengthy love duet between Shanewis and Lionel in the opera’s first part, more than any other passage, provides the evidence to support Merola’s opinion. *Natoma* also presents much potential. In an artistic climate in which the more

¹¹⁹ Eugene E. Simpson, “America’s Position in Music,” in *The International Library of Music: Music Literature Vol. II* (New York: The University Society, 1925), 485.

¹²⁰ “Opera in America Needs More Pride,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 June 1926.

ambitious musical theater pieces have become a regular part of opera companies' repertoire, Herbert's lighter, operetta-style numbers should no longer provide a barrier to the work's acceptance. These were always audience favorites and would likely remain that way today. The title character's powerful role, with the chance to perform the Dagger Dance and stab the antagonist to death on stage, should still reward the efforts of a dramatically gifted soprano.

Poia, *The Sacrifice* and *Azora* present greater challenges. Although all are musically strong, they lack the immediacy of appeal that is a hallmark of Cadman's and Herbert's works. These scores demand top tier singers, orchestras, and conductors in order to achieve a convincing performance. (The recent Montana production of *Poia* illustrates the potential pitfalls.) Although riskier ventures today, the risk has nothing to do with the music's quality. These composers could deploy their operatic forces as thrillingly as any of their European contemporaries. *Narcissa*, on the other hand, might be the most awkward fit within today's scheme. Its unusual dramatic construction, based upon historical events of regional but likely not national familiarity, coupled with Moore's inconsistent score, in which the more inspired passages are offset by apparent inexperience elsewhere, would seem to require a venue with a personal connection to the material in order to be successful. The productions during Moore's lifetime would suggest as much. Nevertheless, as Catherine Parsons Smith has demonstrated in both lecture-recitals and radio broadcasts featuring selections from Moore's operas, the music in *Narcissa* unquestionably deserves a hearing.¹²¹

While the operatic Indians in each of these scores are admittedly stereotyped creations, in general they are far less offensive than what one finds in, say, many of the classic cinema Westerns. Obviously, this aspect would require careful handling in a modern production. The

¹²¹ Special thanks to Lance Bowling, founder and producer of Cambria Records, for providing me with copies of Smith's presentations devoted to Moore's operas.

issue of authenticity, in terms of musical materials, ethnographic details, costuming and set design, will always complicate productions of these works. We would surely be in error today to attempt the kind of authenticity that some early critics erroneously perceived. The assertion that Herbert “doubtless harmonized [his Indian melodies] in the way the Indians themselves would have done it, had they known harmony or used orchestras like ours” is of course ridiculously patronizing to the utmost degree.¹²² Opera is of course theater, and perhaps a more successful approach would make no attempt to “authenticize” these works but would instead capitalize on their inherent dramatic potential. One cannot help but wonder what an imaginative stage director might be able to achieve in a production unconstrained by historical period or locale.

But what about the librettos? I would hope that the seemingly unfair, anti-indigenous double standard which critics have applied to this repertoire since their premieres would now no longer be of much concern. One must simply accept from the outset that these operas do not have the most believable plots—but of course, opera lovers are accustomed suspending their disbelief for much of the standard repertoire too. One could attempt to rewrite the librettos in order to “improve” the language by making it more vernacular and less archaic. The Montana *Poia* illustrates this approach.¹²³ However, I am not entirely convinced that this should be necessary. Why must hearing opera in our native language require that the sung text sound up to date? The success of the Ohio Light Opera Company proves that the period’s operettas need no such intervention. One cannot even imagine the Italians or the Germans revising the librettos to their

¹²² “Victor Herbert’s *Natoma*,” *The Independent* 70 (1911): 660.

¹²³ To return to the love-text which opened chapter three, for example, Hartley’s original lyrics read: “Thy breath is in the breeze / That cometh from the south / Tempting the trembling trees / With yearning for thy mouth. / With thee doth sorrow cease / Without thee gladness dies, / Love at thy feet I lay my soul, my life!” Anne Basinski’s revision still scans, but completely alters the imagery: “It’s you who draws me on. I beg to share your light. You bring the rosy dawn into a life of darkness. My heart is yours forever to do with as you will. Here at your feet I lay my soul, my life!”

nations' early twentieth-century scores. Again, if we can accept the inherent oddity of some unnatural and awkward lyrics, perhaps we can enjoy these operas for what they actually contain, rather than complaining about what we wish they might contain instead, as did so many of the early critics. Text alterations will only result in the loss of period flavor. Surely, some individual lines deserve to be improved with minor adjustments, but wholesale rewriting shows a lack of respect for the original librettist's intentions.

Unavoidably, this period in the nation's operatic history raises a number of unanswerable questions. Given the failure of these works to find a place in the repertoire of the nation's major companies, why did more composers not seek out performances with organizations that specialized in opera in English? Only Herbert's *Natoma* briefly found a home at such a venue (The Century Opera Company). The cosmopolitan operatic centers seemed less able to commit to an American work over the long term; perhaps the less prestigious "specialists" might have provided more committed advocacy. Given the consistent criticism aimed at what were perceived as poor quality librettos, why did American composers not seek to collaborate with the country's successful playwrights? It is not as if the United States lacked writers with theatrical flair and experience. Twice Puccini had turned to David Belasco for source material, but why did no American composer ask him for a libretto? Surely higher quality material and more talented writers could have been found, compared to the six examples in this study.¹²⁴ Given the continued success both Moore and Cadman were able to secure for their operas through personal advocacy, why did Nevin, Converse, and Hadley seem so willing to move on to other projects

¹²⁴ Horatio Parker's collaborator on *Mona*, Brian Hooker, seems a step in the right direction in terms of professional experience. Hooker was a published poet, essayist and novelist, although, if anything, his opera text was perhaps too learned for the genre. Richard Aldrich, for instance, worried that Hooker's lyrics were "at certain points too subtle, too acute to be expounded in the broad strokes that in the main are necessarily employed by the lyric dramatist" and that these subtleties "may easily elude the listener's attention." See Richard Aldrich, "Mona, New American Opera, Warmly Welcomed at the Metropolitan," *New York Times*, 17 March 1912.

and allow their older scores to lie dormant? Finally, if this were a European country—like Great Britain, Germany, or Italy especially, with their federally subsidized operatic scene and prolific, national record labels—then surely all six of these operas would be available in complete professional recordings by now. How differently might we view this period of American operatic history if one could simply play a recording and hear these scores come to life?

While one can only speculate in regards to these questions, I hope that this dissertation has, overall, supplied a more rewarding collection of answers. Perhaps not coincidentally, in 1918 (the year of *Shanewis*'s premiere), literary critic Van Wyck Brooks laid out the guiding principal that I have sought to follow throughout this dissertation. Brooks wrote, "The real task for the American literary historian, then, is not to seek for masterpieces—the few masterpieces are all too obvious—but for tendencies."¹²⁵ His comment applies just as plainly to the American musicologist. My work here has explored the tendencies that promoted the staging of newly composed indigenous operas in the 1910s, the tendencies that impact libretto design and musical style, and the tendencies in reception that are emblematic of the period's operatic works. While later commentators have rejected these works as being insufficiently American, it is clear that the creators themselves were pursuing Americanist goals similar to their more modernist successors. This study may now enable us to view the earlier decades of the twentieth century in a new light. Despite the chorus of naysayers who consistently claimed that American opera was "not yet" a reality, composers like Arthur Nevin, Victor Herbert, Frederick Converse, Mary Carr Moore, Henry Hadley, and Charles Cadman prove not only had the genre indeed arrived, but that it was on its way to becoming a flourishing endeavor.

¹²⁵ Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," *The Dial* 64, no. 7 (11 April 1918): 341.

APPENDIX A: The Operatic Performance Canon

The following set of tables provides data on the operas most frequently performed by the nation's preeminent resident municipal opera companies during the early decades of the twentieth century. As in any demand-driven industry (i.e., the financial necessity to sell tickets and fill the house), one can safely assume that the most popular operas of the period were those which received the most performances. A high frequency of performance also denotes canonic status. That is, the following repertoire lists demonstrate which operas made up the core of the period's performance canon in the United States. The specific makeup of the canon posed significant ramifications for new American operas. Firstly, these lists illustrate the works around which a new opera would need to fit, in order to be a complementary season-mate to what an audience was accustomed to attending. Secondly, the standard repertoire would provide the models most helpful, or at least closest at hand, for a composer coming to opera for the first time, since these works presented tried and tested solutions to the genre's inherent difficulties.

The four companies represented here are the Metropolitan, Manhattan, Boston and Chicago organizations. This includes the companies that premiered four of the six American operas examined in this dissertation. (*Poia* was never staged in the U. S.; *Narcissa* was premiered by an ad hoc local ensemble.) In the case of the Manhattan and Boston companies, the tables cover their respective company's entire history. The Chicago date range extends from the company's founding through the end of the 1918–1919 season. The Metropolitan Opera list includes a broader time span. A somewhat arbitrary starting point of 1890 was chosen as a reasonable early terminus for potential operatic influence upon the generation of composers examined here. (Converse, Hadley, Moore, and Nevin were in their twenties; Herbert was a

generation older, while Cadman turned 10 in 1891.) The end date for the Met list is 1918, contemporary with the Met's final performances of *Shanewis*. There is some variability in how many performances an opera had to receive to make the list, ranging from a low count of 81 (*Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Met) and 12 (*Samson et Dalila* in Boston). The guiding principal was to show consistency of repertoire across these companies, but there was generally an obvious dividing line between those operas which received numerous repeat performances and those which received only a few stagings.

Note that many of the most frequently staged operas today also appear on these repertoire lists from a century ago. Indeed, critics at the time were already complaining of the lack of operatic variety on offer. In 1911, Richard Aldrich recognized that the Metropolitan “has a large public with decided tastes, and is under implied obligation, as well as very great expense ... to produce works that will satisfy their demands” and is thus unable to risk as many new works as he would prefer.¹ In 1913, Henry Finck complained of “the monotony of the Metropolitan repertory” where the operas, “year in and out, are always the same, and usually also the casts vary little.”² Decades later, Deems Taylor recognized that “New York’s famous opera house is an international museum of opera, just as New York’s other Metropolitan is an international museum of painting and sculpture.” As he sarcastically observed, “In the opera, what was good enough for our great-grandfathers is good enough for us.”³ Even as late as 1962, Virgil Thomson still complained of “the external repetition of an ever-narrowing repertory, and one that grows

¹ Richard Aldrich, “What the Season Promises at the Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1911.

² Henry T. Finck, “Neglected Operatic Opportunities,” *The Independent* 74 (1913): 964.

³ Deems Taylor, “What’s Wrong with Opera?” in *Of Men and Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), 212 and 219.

every year less meaningful.”⁴ The legitimacy of these criticisms is immediately apparent when one considers the first table presented in this set—a list of the fifteen all-time most-performed operas at the Met. Note that, without exception, all of these works entered the Met’s repertoire before even one of the American operas discussed here received its stage premiere. Furthermore, note that almost all of these operas are also included in the most-performed lists from the 1910s. Thus for at least a century, the mainstream operatic performance canon in the United States has remained virtually unchanged. It is within this climate of repetition and stasis that new American works, of both yesterday and today, must struggle to earn a hearing and find a place.

Table A.1. Top 15 Most Performed Operas at the Metropolitan ⁵

Rank	Composer	Title	Date of First Met Performance
1	Puccini	<i>La Bohème</i>	11/9/1900
2	Verdi	<i>Aida</i>	11/12/1886
3	Verdi	<i>La Traviata</i>	11/5/1883
4	Bizet	<i>Carmen</i>	1/5/1884
5	Puccini	<i>Tosca</i>	2/4/1901
6	Puccini	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	2/11/1907
7	Verdi	<i>Rigoletto</i>	11/16/1883
8	Gounod	<i>Faust</i>	10/22/1883
9	Mascagni	<i>Pagliacci</i>	12/11/1893
10	Leoncavallo	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>	12/4/1891
11	Wagner	<i>Lohengrin</i>	11/7/1883
12	Verdi	<i>Il Trovatore</i>	10/26/1883
13	Donizetti	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	10/24/1883
14	Rossini	<i>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</i>	11/23/1883
15	Wagner	<i>Die Walküre</i>	1/30/1885

⁴ Virgil Thomson, “Opera: It Is Everywhere in America,” *New York Times*, 23 September 1962.

⁵ Data compiled from the MetOpera Database, online at <<http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm>>.

Table A.2. Metropolitan Opera Company
Most Performed Operas, 1890–1918 ⁶

Count	Composer	Title
270	Gounod	<i>Faust</i>
259	Wagner	<i>Lohengrin</i>
233	Verdi	<i>Aida</i>
231	Bizet	<i>Carmen</i>
189	Leoncavallo	<i>Pagliacci</i>
183	Mascagni	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>
167	Wagner	<i>Tannhäuser</i>
161	Puccini	<i>La Bohème</i>
137	Puccini	<i>Tosca</i>
132	Wagner	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
126	Puccini	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
116	Meyerbeer	<i>Les Huguenots</i>
114	Wagner	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>
113	Verdi	<i>Il Travatore</i>
109	Gounod	<i>Roméo et Juliette</i>
101	Verdi	<i>La Traviata</i>
99	Verdi	<i>Rigoletto</i>
95	Wagner	<i>Siegfried</i>
87	Wagner	<i>Die Walküre</i>
86	Humperdinck	<i>Hansel und Gretel</i>
86	Rossini	<i>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</i>
85	Wagner	<i>Parsifal</i>
81	Donizetti	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>

⁶ Data compiled from *ibid.* This list includes any operas that received more than 80 performances during the chosen time span, based upon calendar years and not performance seasons. The count includes performances given both while on tour and at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

Table A.3. Manhattan Opera Company
Most Performed Operas, 1906–1910 ⁷

Count	Composer	Title
58	Leoncavallo	<i>Pagliacci</i>
53	Bizet	<i>Carmen</i>
45	Verdi	<i>Aida</i>
45	Donizetti	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>
42	Offenbach	<i>Les Contes d'Hoffmann</i>
39	Mascagni	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>
39	Verdi	<i>Rigoletto</i>
33	Verdi	<i>La Traviata</i>
32	Massenet	<i>Thaïs</i>
29	Charpentier	<i>Louise</i>
27	Verdi	<i>Il Trovatore</i>
25	Gounod	<i>Faust</i>
25	Massenet	<i>Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame</i>
22	Puccini	<i>La Bohème</i>
22	Puccini	<i>Tosca</i>
19	Debussy	<i>Pelleas et Melisande</i>
17	Saint-Saens	<i>Samson et Dalila</i>
16	Massenet	<i>La Navarraise</i>
16	Strauss	<i>Salome</i>

⁷ Data compiled from John Fredrick Cone, *Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 285-355. This list includes any operas that received more than 15 performances and spans the company's entire existence.

Table A.4. Boston Opera Company
Most Performed Operas, 1909–1914 ⁸

Count	Composer	Title
38	Puccini	<i>La Bohème</i>
34	Verdi	<i>Aida</i>
34	Bizet	<i>Carmen</i>
27	Leoncavallo	<i>Pagliacci</i>
26	Gounod	<i>Faust</i>
26	Puccini	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
25	Puccini	<i>Tosca</i>
21	Mascagni	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>
20	Verdi	<i>Rigoletto</i>
19	Donizetti	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>
19	Verdi	<i>La Traviata</i>
17	Puccini	<i>La Fanciulla del West</i>
17	Delibes	<i>Lakmé</i>
17	Verdi	<i>Otello</i>
15	Verdi	<i>Il Trovatore</i>
14	Humperdinck	<i>Hansel und Gretel</i>
13	Rossini	<i>Il barbiere di Siviglia</i>
13	Wolf-Ferrari	<i>The Jewels of the Madonna</i>
13	Wagner	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
12	Saint-Saens	<i>Samson et Dalila</i>

⁸ Data compiled from Quaintance Eaton, *The Boston Opera Company* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1965), 282-323. This list includes any operas that received at least a dozen performances and spans the company's entire existence.

Table A.5. Chicago Opera Company
Most Performed Operas, 1910–1919 ⁹

Count	Composer	Title
31	Bizet	<i>Carmen</i>
25	Verdi	<i>Aida</i>
23	Leoncavallo	<i>Pagliacci</i>
23	Massenet	<i>Thaïs</i>
22	Wolf-Ferrari	<i>The Jewels of the Madonna</i>
21	Mascagni	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>
21	Verdi	<i>Rigoletto</i>
21	Puccini	<i>Tosca</i>
19	Puccini	<i>La Bohème</i>
19	Gounod	<i>Faust</i>
18	Puccini	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
17	Verdi	<i>La Traviata</i>
16	Charpentier	<i>Louise</i>
15	Donizetti	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>
14	Gounod	<i>Roméo et Juliette</i>
14	Offenbach	<i>Les Contes d'Hoffmann</i>
13	Massenet	<i>Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame</i>
13	Wagner	<i>Die Walküre</i>

⁹ Data compiled from Ronald L. Davis, *Opera in Chicago* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966), 271-97. This list includes any operas that received more than a dozen performances and covers the period from the company's founding until the end of the 1918–1919 season.

APPENDIX B: Plot Synopses

Rather than creating my own plot summaries, I have instead opted to reproduce synopses first printed around the time of each opera's premiere. These come from a variety of period sources, including newspapers and the published scores or libretti. Thus, readers can here learn the stories of these operas through the same words as did the first audiences a century ago. (N.B. Some paragraph breaks, punctuation, and other formatting issues have been standardized without comment.)

COMPOSER: **Charles Wakefield Cadman**

LIBRETTIST: Nelle Richmond Eberhart

TITLE: *Shanewis* (or *The Robin Woman*)¹

Mrs. J. Asher Everton, a wealthy widow and prominent club woman of southern California, has become interested in Shanewis, a beautiful educated Indian girl of musical promise, sending her to New York for vocal training. After several years' study, Shanewis is invited by her benefactress to spend the summer in her bungalow by the sea. A few days before, Amy Everton has returned home from a long trip abroad following her graduation from Vassar and, in honor of both girls, Mrs. Everton gives a dinner dance and musicale. Shanewis, who does not dine before singing, makes her first appearance before Mrs. Everton's guests when she comes into the music room to sing.

Her initial number, "The Spring Song of the Robin Woman," a Tsimshian legend, together with the thrilling quality of her voice, her undoubted histrionic ability, and her engaging smile, create a sensation even among the older, more critical guests.

Lionel Rhodes, the childhood sweetheart and acknowledged fiancé of Amy, is fascinated by the charm and novelty of Shanewis. He sees first her photograph which, he declares, recalls to his memory a beautiful face which had attracted him in Arizona two or three years before. Upon meeting her, he names her immediately "Enchantress," "The Robin Woman" who calls springtime to the heart, and he makes impetuous love to her behind a screen of palms while the guests are out on the terrace dancing. Shanewis is at first shy, but, finally, not knowing of his engagement to the daughter of her benefactress, she yields to his wooing conditionally. The condition is that he go with her to her home on the reservation to see if her family be any bar to his regard. He consents and their interview is

¹ This plot synopsis, the work of librettist Eberhart, appears in both the published piano-vocal score and the libretto. It was also shared with the general public, in abbreviated form, in "Home Talent Gets Its Innings At Last," *New York Times*, 17 March 1918. The full version is reproduced here. See Charles Wakefield Cadman, *The Robin Woman (Shanewis): An American Opera* (Boston: White-Smith Music Publishing Co., 1918), 4–5; or Nelle Richmond Eberhart, *Shanewis (The Robin Woman): An Opera* (New York: F. Rullman, 1918), 2–3.

terminated by the entrance of Amy with a young man who seeks the next dance with the Indian girl. Surprised and annoyed by their evident confusion at her interruption, Amy jealously protests to Lionel, and is not reassured by his half-hearted efforts to propitiate her. She begins to fear that her long absence has weakened the bond between her and her lover. Throwing herself upon his breast she cries, "Ah, suppose you ceased to love me!" At this moment, the clock strikes twelve and the guests hasten in to take their departure. They congratulate Mrs. Everton and Shanewis, rallying Amy, teasingly, about her lover's interest in the Indian girl. As the guests disappear through the hall door, Shanewis switches off the music room lights and stands in the moonlight alone, dreaming of the romance which has so suddenly come to her.

The second part takes place in Oklahoma a few days later. With a plausible excuse, Shanewis has left Mrs. Everton for the reservation where Lionel has secretly followed her. They are discovered watching the closing scenes of a big summer powwow. Instead of being repelled, the gay and brilliant pageant, the mingling of traditional, of transitional and of modern Indian life appeals to his strong sense of the picturesque. He watches with lively interest the crowds about the refreshment booths, the gay blankets, the Indian mothers with babies in cradleboards, the dancers in regalia, and the white visitors in holiday attire. The ceremonial songs, even, move him strangely, so that his impulsive love for Shanewis grows stronger in the vivid atmosphere which belongs to her. Therefore when Philip Harjo, a fanatical young Indian devoted to the old traditions, presents Shanewis with a poisoned arrow once used by a maiden of the tribe to revenge herself upon a white betrayer, he [Lionel] is piqued and assures Harjo that Shanewis will never have use for such a weapon.

Harjo, the foster brother of Shanewis, is an idealist who has brooded over the wrongs of his people until he has acquired a morbid hatred of the white race and resents all attempts at modern civilization. From childhood he has loved Shanewis, but as she grew older and became ambitious for musical training, he kept his passion secret, hoping she would fail to win recognition and be driven by her failure back to her tribe and his love. Her love for a white man comes like a blow to his hopes and his traditions. He is suspicious of Lionel's impulsive attachment and, throughout the powwow he watches his chance to prove his rival faithless.

Lionel and Shanewis attract much attention especially among the white people. A Jazz Band [sic] of young people serenades them, and young high school girls hover around allured by the handsome Californian. Lionel begs Shanewis to leave early but she insists on staying to the end. When the crowd has nearly all departed, the booths have been stripped, and Shanewis has accepted the poisoned arrow from Harjo, Mrs. Everton and Amy hasten up in traveling costume. They strive to check Lionel's mad infatuation for Shanewis. He refuses absolutely to return with them and declares anew his love for Shanewis. But the Indian girl, learning of the first time of his engagement to Amy, rejects his love with scorn. She insists upon surrendering him to Amy, thus repaying her debt to Mrs. Everton. Passionately she denounces the white race and its dealings with her people. She then declares her intention of retiring from civilization to seek refuge in the forest, near to God, to recover from her wound. Recognizing the evolutionary distance between her and that other maid who sought revenge for treachery, she throws the bow and arrow far from her.

Though all the other Indians had left at the beginning of the altercation, Philip Harjo watches the scene from behind a tree. As Shanewis repulses Lionel, Harjo rushes out, snatches up the bow and arrow and shoots the young man straight in the heart. Shanewis runs back; she and Amy kneel beside him, while Mrs. Everton frantically attempts to drag Amy from the scene. Shanewis looks upward, saying, "Tis well. In death thou art mine!"

COMPOSER: **Frederick S. Converse**

LIBRETTIST: Frederick Converse, with lyrics by John Macy

TITLE: *The Sacrifice*²

Chonita is a Mexican girl of rank. She is beloved by two young officers of the contending forces: Bernal, a Mexican, whom she loves, and Burton, an American. Chonita intervenes in an encounter between them and is wounded. Her lover is taken prisoner. Burton spares to her the life of his rival and is himself killed. Hence the name, "The Sacrifice."

[...]

In the hills overlooking a mission, is the house of Senora Anaya, Chonita's aunt. In the old garden are the young girl and the old Indian servant [Tomasa] who sits upon the ground combing her mistress' long, black hair. It is afternoon. Chonita is half reclining upon a divan, singing and accompanying her song upon the guitar. Chonita is singing of Bernal, her lover, who is hiding in the hills from the Americans at the mission. The mention of the hated race of "gringos" incites Tomasa to a long and impassioned scene, in which she relates the old Indian prophecy of the Hiahi that her people would succumb to the march of the white man in his insatiable thirst for gold. She sings with deep pathos a farewell to her Westland.

Pablo, the son of Tomasa, brings Chonita a note from Bernal, telling of his arrival within the hour. Chonita urges Pablo to warn her lover that Capt Burton is accustomed to call at dusk and to therefore use caution. Tomasa pleads with the girl not to see Burton and insists that he loves her. Chonita reminds her that for the present they must have his friendship and protection.

Burton arrives. Chonita receives him with courtesy, but coldly. At his request, she takes the guitar and sings for him. In the conversation, she finds occasion to speak bitterly of the oppression and cruelty of his soldiers. Burton, in a long romanza, protests the charge, assuring her that the riches of her country demand strong protectors, which his people would be, even by rigorous means. He grows more impassioned and declares his love for her. At his utterance of her name Bernal, who had been secreting himself in the border of the wood, starts, and is seen by Chonita. She tells the American that her love is given and leaves him bewildered.

When Burton has gone, Chonita calls softly to Bernal in the olive grove. He answers and appears. They embrace, but he recoils and upbraids her with anger for the scene with Burton. Chonita avows her hatred for the American, but urges her need for his protection for herself and her aged aunt. Bernal tells of his anticipated attack upon the mission and the Americans that night. The two sing rapturously of their love. Pablo's signal song of warning is heard [offstage] in the grove. Tomasa appears at the door. There are a few measures of quartet before Bernal departs and the act ends.

In the interim between this and the following act, the Mexicans under Bernal make their midnight attack upon the Americans in the mission and are severely repulsed. The curtain rises upon the interior of the building the next morning. Roistering, chaos and sacrilege stamp the scene. There are two groups of soldiers. Those on the right are sitting upon boxes and broken furniture cleaning weapons and accoutrements; those on the left are laughing, jesting and playing cards. On a rough couch against the wall, a soldier lies with bandaged head. Various paraphernalia of war, arms, blankets, etc., are strewn about. Near the altar at the rear a disfigured statue of the Holy Virgin stands upon a pedestal, the broken pieces scattered about its base. The sole relief to this picture of stress and disorder is a view through a passageway to a bright, sunlit garden beyond.

² This synopsis would have been many readers' first introduction to the plot of Converse's opera, as it forms the second half of an article published several months before the premiere. See "Boston Man Has Written a New Opera," *Boston Globe*, 27 November 1910.

Corp Tom Flynn ... sings the inevitable bravado air of home, sweetheart and martial glory, to which his fellow-soldier[s] ... assent with much vocal sonority. After bantering Little Jack upon his questionable bravery in the fray of the night just past, Corp Flynn sings another song full of ghostly mystery and low notes. There are valiant rejoinders from all hands. Magdalena, an Indian girl, arrives, sings, gives the soldiers flowers and receives coins. A gypsy appears singing a lively tune. Spanish girls appear with her. They sing and begin to dance. Ere long, the men have caught them and joined in the dance.

Tomasa appears with anxiety and asks Tom if Capt Burton is there, and says her mistress has come to see him. Chonita enters. She is appalled at the desecration before her. Both sing a prayer. Burton appears. He tells of one rider who pursued him with peculiar insistence, and it cost him his life. Chonita, shaken with fear, asks the color of his horse. Burton answers "white." She cries out that it was Bernal and swoons. When she revives, Burton attempts to comfort her, and makes new declarations of his love, which she repudiates. He affirms his devotion with greater intensity. She spurns him after a dialogue work[s] up to an exceedingly impassioned climax. Burton leaves the room.

While Chonita prays, a priest enters. It is Bernal in disguise. The lovers greet each other in a delirium of joy. At the return of the soldiers, Chonita secrets her lover in the confessional. Burton reenters, believing that prayer has sobered her judgment. She tries cleverly to disarm [his] suspicion while parleying for time and escape. Burton fancies she is beginning to accede to his love, when Bernal sets upon him with uplifted dagger. Burton draws quickly to defend himself. Chonita rushes between and is wounded by Burton's sword. She falls. Corp Tom and two soldiers seize and bind Bernal after a struggle.

The third act takes place before the dawn in Senora Anaya's house. Chonita sleeps fitfully. Tomasa watches over her. The light is dim. Chonita dreams she hears a shot. If they shoot Bernal, she will die. Tomasa watches eagerly for Padre Gabriel, the priest, and sings as in the beginning of the story, "Tis true, as ever, love brings life and death." This is the problem of the play.

The dawn is giving place to day. The sunrise hymn is heard without. Chonita sings a prayer for the deliverance of her lover. From the camp at the mission is heard a cannon shot and a trumpet playing reveille. Chonita is frantic with dread. Presently, Burton and the corporal enter with Bernal. They release him and permit him to approach the bedside. Chonita sobs upon his breast. The scene is tense with passion and the portent of death. Chonita calls Burton, reminds him of his promise to do all a man may do, and asks for Bernal's life. As he remonstrates, Mexican reinforcements arrive. He feigns attack upon a Mexican soldier, receives his blade and falls. Chonita and Bernal are led away.

[To supplement the rather cursory plot ending supplied in this newspaper column, the following text is taken from Olin Downes' synopsis included in the published libretto.³]

[...] Chonita, for the last time, begs him to spare Bernal, reminds him of his promise to do for her "all that man can do." If Bernal dies, she will die; if he lives, she will live. Burton impresses upon her that it is not his wish, but the dictates of honor which he must follow. He believes the word of Chonita, but how to make his men think that Bernal does not merit the end of a spy. Duty! Honor! Would that he might die with honor; he would give his life for Chonita. And the priest answers sternly that his prayer is heard, that even now death awaits him. "I, God's messenger, bear you his summons." Shots ring out. The two soldiers stationed outside of the door at the end of the room rush in and commence to barricade the passage. They tell the Captain that a trap has been set. The door on

³ Olin Downes, "Synopsis," in Frederick S. Converse and John Macy, *The Sacrifice: An Opera in Three Acts* (New York: H.W. Gray Company, 1911), 16–17.

the left flies open, and Tom rushes in wounded and pursued by two Mexicans. As he dies, he calls to his commander to save himself.

Sudden decision shows on Burton's face. He sends the other two soldiers back to their posts. He turns to Chonita. He gladly offers his life that she may have freedom, love, and joy. Drawing his sword, he makes at the nearest Mexican, lowers his guard and is killed. Tomasa, as she covers the body, reflects again on love, and life, and death. ... Chonita, overwhelmed with the greatness of Burton's deed, is supported by Bernal as she advances, and kneels by the body. Pablo and several attendants enter with a litter for Chonita. There is solemn music, as for a processional, while Chonita and Bernal are gently led away.

COMPOSER: **Henry Hadley**

LIBRETTIST: David Stevens

TITLE: *Azora: The Daughter of Montezuma* ⁴

Xalca, a Prince of Tlascala, having been overcome in battle by Montezuma, is now residing in the latter's capital, a nominal prisoner of war. Actually he stands high in the Emperor's favor as a military leader; having submitted to Montezuma's rule, he has been given an important command. The true reason for Xalca's devotion to Montezuma's interests lies in his love for Azora, the Emperor's daughter, who is destined by her father to be the wife of Ramatzin, titular chief of Montezuma's army. She, however, has given her love unreservedly to Xalca and regards Ramatzin's pretensions with disdain.

Owing to Xalca's anomalous position, his betrothal to Azora has been kept secret in the hope that an impending war with Tarascan will afford him an opportunity to so distinguish himself that his claim to equal standing with all will be recognized. Ramatzin, however, already resentful and angry at Xalca's success and popularity, is further enraged by the suspicion that Azora loves the Tlascalan, and all the energies of his bitter and unscrupulous nature are employed to defeat the hopes and aspirations of his rival. Such is the situation when the action of the story begins.

It is the morning of the Feast of Totec, a ceremony requiring the sacrifice of many lives to the Sun-god, not only for his nourishment and subsistence, but to secure his favor in the impending war with Tarascan. Before the Feast begins, Ramatzin imparts his suspicions concerning Azora and Xalca to Canek, the fanatical High Priest of the Sun, who, knowing Montezuma's fierce pride in his race, foresees great trouble should Azora disregard her father's wishes with respect to Ramatzin. Accordingly, with the hope of dissuading Xalca from so dangerous a purpose, he charges him with aspiring to win the hand of the Emperor's daughter, an ambition beyond the hope of all save the noblest of her own race. Xalca admits his love for Azora and proudly refuses to surrender her. Canek bids him beware of the consequences of his rashness, and withdraws, declaring that he will beseech the gods to intervene. Azora then appears; in a passionate scene with Xalca their mutual love and devotion are reasserted.

The ceremonies of the Feast now begin with a general assembling of Montezuma's people, together with the Emperor are his sister, Papantzin, Canek, the Fire-Priests, Dancing Girls and Soldiers. The Sacrificial Victims are brought forth and all are about to proceed to the scene of the

⁴ This synopsis is taken from the published libretto; David Stevens, *Azora, the Daughter of Montezuma: An Opera in Three Acts* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1917), 5–6.

sacrifice, when Montezuma, observing that his daughter is not present, inquires the reason. Papan declares that she dissuaded Azora from presenting herself at the ceremony, believing the sacrificial rites to be wicked and unhallowed. Though Montezuma rebukes her for her apostasy, she relates a vision in which she beheld and heard a messenger from the true God, who proclaimed the coming of Christ's warriors and the victory of the Cross over blindness and superstition.

Montezuma is momentarily affected by her recital, but at that moment Ramatzin appears with the news that the approach of the Tarascan has been signaled from the mountains, and all is forgotten except the sacrifice to the Sun-god and immediate preparations for battle. Xalca is summoned and Montezuma entrusts him with the campaign against the enemy, promising him whatever he may demand if he return victorious. Xalca eagerly undertakes the task, seeing therein his chance to win Azora unopposed. He departs forthwith, and, despite the earnest protests of Papan, the sacrificial ceremony proceeds.

A month has elapsed without news from Xalca; Azora seeks the Temple of Totec at sunset, and before the Sacred Fire prays for her lover's safe and victorious return. Her devotions are interrupted by Canek, who tries to convince her that Xalca is defeated and dead. He further declares that Montezuma, angry at the apparent failure of Xalca's army, has determined on a second expedition under Ramatzin's command and that a swift runner has been dispatched with a message to Xalca that if he be alive and beaten, he may remain away. Canek, however, interprets Xalca's silence as certain proof of his defeat and death, and leaves Azora all but hopeless.

Ramatzin now presents himself and urges his claim for her hand. He pleads humbly enough until it becomes obvious that Azora holds him in contempt, when his passion and anger lead him to affront her by his brutality. Canek appears in response to her cries and intervenes, although he pleads Ramatzin's cause until she dismisses them both peremptorily.

The hour of prayer having now arrived, Montezuma and his people enter the Temple and appeal to Totec for aid. Ramatzin, being commanded to lead his men to the scene of war, declares his readiness to depart, but demands that Azora be formally betrothed to him before he goes forth. The Emperor accedes without hesitation, and Azora is bidden to take the required vows. She refuses, and Ramatzin is driven by his fury to charge her with loving the Tlascalan. She proudly admits the charge and passionately asserts that she will wed no other. Montezuma sternly commands submission, and refuses to hear her final appeal; she defies him and reasserts her determination to wed Xalca if he be alive. Montezuma, enraged, swears that if Xalca appears before him with such bold pretensions, his fate shall be certain and swift death.

At this instant a distant trumpet is heard; the assembly stands in silent and breathless expectation, and the runner who was sent to seek out Xalca's army staggers up the steps of the Temple to announce the approach of Xalca victorious. The trumpets sound again, and amid the triumphant songs and acclamations of his soldiers, Xalca appears in the entrance to the Temple. He proclaims victory and gives thanks to Totec, asking that on the morrow a sacrifice be made to the god.

Montezuma, speaking for the first time since Xalca's appearance, grimly assures him that a sacrifice shall be made. Xalca, now observing the ominous silence that pervades the assembly, but ignorant of its meaning, lays his sword at the Emperor's feet and claims his reward—the hand of Azora. Montezuma, in an outburst of fury, denounces him as an alien slave; and when Azora also demands that her father keep his plighted word, he declares that they shall indeed be made one—and by the hand of Death! The lovers are made prisoners and condemned to die at sunrise on the Altar of Sacrifice. The scene closes amid the jubilant shouts of Xalca's soldiers, without the Temple and unaware of their leader's fate.

In the hour preceding dawn on the following morning, Azora and Papantzin are seen in the Cavern of Sacrifice, the latter seeking to administer the consolations of faith in the true religion of Christ as revealed in her vision. Azora is not unresponsive, but is unable wholly to comprehend the significance of Papan's belief. Canek presently appears with news that Montezuma has determined to spare his daughter's life if she will accept Ramatzin. The latter is now admitted, together with Xalca, who, being acquainted with the Emperor's proposal, joins the others in begging her to yield, that he alone may pay the penalty of their ill-starred attachment. Azora refuses her father's clemency and declares her readiness for death with her lover.

Montezuma and his people now appear and Azora's determination is made known to him, whereupon he harshly directs Canek to perform his office. The prisoners are placed upon the Altar of Sacrifice. Canek prepares to dispatch them by his own hand as soon as the shaft of sunlight admitted by a cleft in the wall shall rest upon the victims, this being regarded as a mystic signal from the Sun-god.

The moment is at hand; the High Priest, armed with the keen flint weapon of his office, has raised his arm to strike, when strange voices are heard singing the noble theme that has expressed Papan's faith in the true God. Awe-stricken silence falls upon the assembly; Canek's arm is involuntarily stayed; the voices draw nearer and the music grows more exalted. Suddenly there appears in the entrance the figure of Cortés mounted on a white charger and accompanied by his warriors and a band of Priests bearing white banners emblazoned with the symbol of the Christian religion and led by one holding aloft a great white Cross.

The people of Montezuma are filled with apprehension and dismay while, amid the chanting of the Spanish Priests, the bearer of the Cross makes his way unopposed to the Altar. As he reaches the prisoners, a shaft of sunlight falls directly upon the white Cross; Canek's nerveless hand releases his weapon and he falls senseless before the holy symbol. Montezuma and his people call frantically on their god Totec to protect them, but the overpowering manifestation of Christian faith is invincible and the scene closes with the triumphant strains of *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*.

COMPOSER: **Victor Herbert**

LIBRETTIST: Joseph D. Redding

TITLE: *Natoma*⁵

The first act takes place on the Island of Santa Cruz, off the coast of California. The time is 1820, when California was under the dominion of Spain. Barbara, the daughter of Don Francisco, a Spaniard of the old regime, Natoma, an Indian girl,⁶ and Lieut. Paul Merrill of the United States Navy are the central characters in the story. The rising curtain shows the hacienda of Don Francisco, who awaits the coming of his daughter from the convent across the water. His song of praise is interrupted by the arrival of Alvarado, Barbara's cousin, and his companions, Jose Castro, a half breed, and Pico and Kagama. As Barbara has not arrived, the four go off in search of game.

⁵ The summary presented here, in Redding's own words, was included in Glenn Dillard Gunn, "Natoma's Initial Chicago Production Scheduled Event of Opera Week," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 10 December 1911. A more detailed synopsis accompanied the published piano-vocal score; see "Story of the Opera," in Victor Herbert, *Natoma* (New York: Schirmer, 1911), v-x.

⁶ Most other period synopses explain that Natoma's name literally means "the Maid from the Mountains."

Then over the hilltop come Natoma and Lieut. Merrill. From the neck of the Indian maiden hangs an amulet—the shell of abalone. Paul persuades her to tell him the secret of the charm. The first father of her people, Natoma says, stepped from the clouds in the dawn of some far off morning. Then a terrible famine came and the father of the tribe prayed to the spirit of the mountain and the water. In answer to the prayer, the ocean tossed up in untold numbers the abalone that contained meat for all the people. When the first father died, he told his sons the story of the wonderful shell, which should go through the generations as a deed of gift and plenty. The last of her race, the shell now rests on the breast of Natoma—princess of her scattered tribe.

Paul is touched by this story, but he questions Natoma about her companion, Barbara. Feeling that Paul will love Barbara, Natoma begs the lieutenant to beat her, kill her even, but let her be his slave. At the end of her piteous plea, Barbara, Father Peralta and the convent girls arrive and are joyously greeted. Barbara meets Paul and both know that they will love each other. All enter the hacienda except Natoma. She is stopped by the half-breed, Jose Castro, who wants her to go with him to the mountains and make war on both Americans and Spaniards. She rebukes him for his proposal. Soon Alvarado and his companions return and the former serenades Barbara. She appears in answer to his song, but she rejects his love. Maddened by the rebuff, Alvarado plans to kill Lieut. Paul. But Castro suggests a better way. Tomorrow a fiesta will be given on the mainland in Barbara's honor. Then they can carry the girl off to the mountains on swift horses. The others come out of the hacienda, and with the coming of night, Father Peralta and the convent girls depart. Paul now declares his love for Barbara. But as Paul leaves and Barbara retires into the hacienda a light appears at one of the windows. The face of Natoma, the look of fate upon it, is seen behind the light.

Act two takes place in front of the mission church on the mainland. In the dawn Natoma appears, sad and forlorn, her heart torn by doubts and fears. She prays [to] the Great Manitou, Spirit of the Hills, as the church bell calls to morning worship. Soon the plaza is full of people and Spanish soldiers come on the scene. The national salute, the flag of Spain, is raised to the breeze. The vaqueros and rancheros arrive and sing to the maidens their stirring song of life on the plains. Alvarado and Castro, Pico and Kagama are warmly greeted. The girls dance, and soon Barbara and her father and the others arrive, Barbara on horseback. After the Castilian custom, Don Francisco places a woof of royal lace on Barbara's head, signifying that she inherits his estate. Barbara now sings a beautiful ode to spring, and Alvarado invites her to join in the dance. But the minuet is interrupted by a cannon shot. Lieut. Paul arrives, and in ardent voice sings a tribute to Columbus.

Now the minuet begins again and soon breaks into the "dance of declaration" [i.e., a Pañuelo], each man at the climax placing his hat on the head of the girl he loves. Barbara gaily tosses Alvarado's hat into the crowd. The Spaniard is in a rage, but all of a sudden, Castro steps forward. He dares any one to dance with him the dagger dance of the ancient Californians. The onlookers are stunned by the challenge, but Natoma steps forth and sticks her dagger into the ground beside that of Castro. To a wild, barbaric rhythm, the dance begins. Meanwhile Alvarado throws his serape over Barbara and is about to carry her off. Natoma, seeing him, jerks up her dagger, and rushing past Castro, sinks the knife into the back of the Spaniard. Alvarado falls dead. In an instant, all rush on Natoma to kill her. But Lieut. Paul takes command and holds back the crowd. Then the church doors open and Father Peralta appears holding the cross. Instantly the tumult dies. Natoma, penitent, walks over to the church steps and falls at the padre's feet.

The third act takes place inside the Mission church. Natoma is huddled before the altar—a heartbroken princess of a vanishing tribe. Father Peralta tells her there is but one God and that she is in his house. But Natoma will not hear him and wants to return to her people. The padre is more tender now as he tells her of the love of the Madonna. But still Natoma is deaf to his plea. Then the priest touches her heart by speaking of her beloved Barbara. Natoma now realizes that her own hope of happiness has vanished but that she must make Barbara happy. Father Peralta now orders the candles lit; the doors open and the chorale beings. The church fills rapidly, and in the throng are Paul

and Barbara, who sit with eyes fixed on Natoma. Father Peralta proclaims the divine word. Soon the convent doors open and in a flood of light the Ursuline nuns are kneeling in the convent garden. Natoma walks down to where Paul and Barbara kneel before her. She lifts the amulet from her breast and bestows it on the Spanish girl. Then she turns and walks into the light and the garden beyond. An instant she pauses: then the doors close behind her as the orchestra cries out in double forte the Indian theme of Fate.

COMPOSER: **Mary Carr Moore**

LIBRETTIST: Sarah Pratt Carr

TITLE: *Narcissa* (or *The Cost of Empire*)⁷

ACT I. Marcus Whitman, after a long absence in the Northwest, returns to his native village accompanied by two Indians, arriving during the Sabbath morning service. He comes to plead for help that he may carry the gospel to the Indians of that far West. Narcissa Prentice, his betrothed, begs to go with him, and Marcus, though fearing for her safety, finally yields, his own desire supplementing hers. They are united and sped on their westward journey amid tears and prayers of the congregation.

ACT II. Opens at the historic old Fort Vancouver, stronghold of the Hudson's Bay Company, where Dr. McLaughlin commands in baronial splendor. He is expected home from his historic trip to England, and arrives laden with gifts. Amid the general rejoicing, the signal gun is heard, and all is commotion and terror. The song of the approaching missionaries reassures the Fort people, and the missionaries are royally welcomed. Yellow Serpent, Chief of the Allied Tribes, invites Marcus to install his mission at Waiilatpu, promising him support and the friendship of the tribes.

ACT III. Autumn, several years later. The orphaned child of a settler lies in the cradle of Narcissa's dead baby. The coming of many immigrants, destroying pasture and driving away game, has made the Indians sullen and resentful. Delaware Tom incites them to open rebellion. The Whitmans are upheld by Yellow Serpent, Elijah, his young son, and Siskadee. An outbreak is impending, but Narcissa with her beautiful voice weaves a spell about the superstitious Indians, subduing them temporarily. Dr. McLaughlin comes and new promises are made, but the arrival of immigrants rekindles the anger of the Indians. Elijah, to avert open rupture, plans an expedition to California, and promises Siskadee to return in the spring and make her his bride. Marcus discovers that Congress proposes to let England have the Northwest, and starts upon his terrible and historic midwinter overland journey to save the Northwest to the United States.

ACT IV. The next spring. Marcus has returned successful. Indian maidens in gala attire go out to meet the returning braves from California. Waskema, the Indian prophetess, foretells impending catastrophe. Narcissa is apprehensive. Indian discontent grows. Soon the death wail is heard. The braves return, many horses riderless. Yellow Serpent, stricken with grief, relates the cowardly murder by a white man, of young Elijah while on his knees in prayer at Sutter's Fort. The Indians are enraged. While Yellow Serpent goes to his lodge, Delaware Tom incites the friendly

⁷ Carr's own plot summary, reproduced here, appears in the published libretto and in slightly modified form in the piano-vocal score; see Sarah Pratt Carr, *The Cost of Empire: Libretto for the Opera Narcissa* (Seattle, Wash.: The Stuff Printing Concern, 1912), 5. A comment included in the libretto but excluded from the score claims, "The story follows history almost exactly, departing from it only in trifles and in compressing events, to fit the necessities of stage portrayal."

Indians, the Cayuses, to massacre the immigrants. In their absence the stranger tribes, hostiles, guided by Tom, batter down the Mission House door, and kill the inmates, including Marcus and Narcissa, their “golden singing bird.”

Dr. McLaughlin arrives but too late. Yellow Serpent is summoned and he swears vengeance on all who participated in the massacre. On the hillside, Siskadee mourns her lover, and through all wails the death chant of the Indian women.

COMPOSER: **Arthur Nevin**

LIBRETTIST: Randolph Hartley

TITLE: *Poia*⁸

The plot has to do with the life of Poia, who stands as the Christ figure in the legend of the Northwestern Indians, and the action takes place at a period before the invasion by Europeans of America. Thus the opera is essentially “of the soil.” [...] Poia, whose name the Indians pronounce Poy-ee-ah, with the accent on the second syllable, is a young Blackfoot of humble origin, scorned by the tribe on account of a mystery surrounding his birth, and ridiculed because of a strange scar which disfigures his face. He is deeply and hopelessly in love with Natoya, the most beautiful woman in the tribe and a daughter of a prominent chief. Natoya loves Sumatsi, a noted warrior and hunter, but an evil man, and in order to be rid of Poia she tells him that she will not accept him as her lover unless he removes the scar.

Poia is told by Nenahu, a medicine woman, that the sun-god placed the scar on his face and he only can remove it. The scene closes with Poia starting on his journey to the home of the sun-god.

In the second act, Poia is seen at daybreak in a deep forest among the mountains after enduring many hardships. He is exhausted and disheartened when he sees the sun rise, and falling on his knees he sees the sun-god in his Court surrounded by his followers. Poia remains in the sun-god’s Court and wins favor by saving the life of Morning Star, the god’s only son.

The sun-god removes the scar from Poia’s face and sends him to earth to pardon the Blackfeet for their sins and to instruct them in the worship of the sun, moon, and morning star. Showing him the Milky Way, or as the Indians call it, the Wolf Trail, Morning Star takes Poia to earth, giving him a magic flute and teaching him a wonderful love song that enables him to win any maiden he loves.

Act III shows the Blackfeet during Poia’s absence. Misfortune fell on the people, and, camped near the mountains in the late spring, which the Blackfeet call the Moon of Flowers, they blame Natoya for their troubles. During a long scene between Natoya and Sumatsi, Poia’s magic love song is heard, and the maiden immediately loves the singer and hates Sumatsi.

The returned traveler is welcomed by the tribe as a great prophet, but Sumatsi in a jealous rage attempts to kill Poia. Natoya receives her death wound shielding the prophet. The heavens opening, the sun-god appears, strikes down Sumatsi with a bright shaft of light, and calls the lovers to the sky. Bearing the dying Natoya in his arms, Poia mounts upward and disappears forever from the Blackfeet.

⁸ This synopsis appeared in a half-page *New York Times* spread detailing the opera’s upcoming Berlin premiere; see “Berlin Welcomes the First Serious American Opera,” *New York Times*, 10 April 1910.

APPENDIX C:
Casts of the Premiere Performances

COMPOSER: **Charles Wakefield Cadman**
LIBRETTIST: Nelle Richmond Eberhart
TITLE: *Shanewis* (or *The Robin Woman*)
DATE: 23 March 1918
VENUE: Metropolitan Opera House, New York City

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Shanewis (mezzo-soprano)	Sophie Braslau
Lionel Rhodes (tenor)	Paul Althouse
Amy Everton (soprano)	Marie Sundelius
Mrs. Everton (contralto)	Kathleen Howard
Philip Harjo (baritone)	Thomas Chalmers

CONDUCTOR: Roberto Moranzoni ¹

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COMPOSER: **Frederick S. Converse**
LIBRETTIST: Frederick Converse, with lyrics by John Macy
TITLE: *The Sacrifice*
DATE: 3 March 1911
VENUE: Boston Opera House

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Chonita (soprano)	Alice Nielsen
Captain Burton (baritone)	Roman Blanchart
Bernal (tenor)	Florencio Constantino
Tomasa (contralto)	Maria Claessens
Magdalena (soprano)	Bernice Fisher
Corporal Tom Flynn (bass)	Howard White

CONDUCTOR: Wallace Goodrich ²

¹ Information from the MetOpera Database, <<http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm>>.

² Information from Edward Ellsworth Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1934), 135; and “Critical Review of the Opera’s Music and Story,” *Boston Globe*, 4 March 1911.

COMPOSER: **Henry Hadley**
LIBRETTIST: David Stevens
TITLE: *Azora: The Daughter of Montezuma*
DATE: 26 December 1917
VENUE: Auditorium Theatre, Chicago

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Azora (soprano)	Anna Fitziu
Xalca (tenor)	Forrest Lamont
Ramatzin (baritone)	Arthur Middleton
Papantzin (contralto)	Cyrena Van Gordon
Montezuma (bass)	James Goddard
Canek (bass)	Frank Preisch

CONDUCTOR: Henry Hadley ³

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COMPOSER: **Victor Herbert**
LIBRETTIST: Joseph D. Redding
TITLE: *Natoma*
DATE: 25 February 1911
VENUE: Metropolitan Opera House, Philadelphia

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Natoma (soprano)	Mary Garden
Barbara de la Guerra (soprano)	Lillian Grenville
Lt. Paul Merrill (tenor)	John McCormack
Don Francisco de la Guerra (bass)	Gustave Huberdeau
Juan Bautista Alvarado (baritone)	Mario Sammarco
José Castro (baritone)	Frank Preisch
Father Peralta (bass)	Hector Dufranne

CONDUCTOR: Cleofante Campanini ⁴

³ Cast list given in the published vocal score: Henry Hadley, *Azora: The Daughter of Montezuma* (New York: Schirmer, 1917), 5. Note that this source provides an incorrect premiere date of 18 December 1917, as originally planned, before delays pushed this back to the 26th.

⁴ Information from Hipsher, *American Opera*, 261. Note that the published vocal score incorrectly gives the premiere date as 23 February 1911, which was in fact only a public dress rehearsal (ibid., 260). This world-premiere production was presented by the Chicago Opera Company on tour in Philadelphia and New York. For the subsequent Chicago premiere, cast changes included Caroline White as Barbara, George Hamlin as Paul, and Henri Scott as Don Francisco. See Glenn Dillard Gunn, "Natoma's Initial Chicago Production Scheduled Event of Opera Week," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 10 December 1911.

COMPOSER: **Mary Carr Moore**
LIBRETTIST: Sarah Pratt Carr
TITLE: *Narcissa* (or *The Cost of Empire*)
DATE: 22 April 1912
VENUE: Moore Theater, Seattle, Washington

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Narcissa Whitman (soprano)	Luella Chilson Ohrman
Marcus Whitman (tenor)	Charles Hargreaves
Delaware Tom (baritone)	Charles Derbyshire
Waskema (mezzo-soprano)	Mme. Hesse-Sprotte [Anna Ruzena Sprotte]
Elijah (tenor)	Alfred A. Owens
Siskadee (contralto)	Romeyn Jansen
Chief Yellow Serpent (baritone)	Frederick Graham

CONDUCTOR: Mary Carr Moore ⁵

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COMPOSER: **Arthur Nevin**
LIBRETTIST: Randolph Hartley (sung in Eugenie von Huhn's German translation)
TITLE: *Poia*
DATE: 23 April 1910
VENUE: Royal Opera House, Berlin

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Poia (tenor)	Walter Kirchoff
Natoya (soprano)	Mrs. Francis MacLennan (i.e., Florence Easton)
Sumatsi (baritone)	[?] Bischoff
Nenahu (contralto)	Margarete Ober
Natosi (bass)	Putnam Griswold

CONDUCTOR: Carl Muck ⁶

⁵ Information from "Mrs. Moore's Opera to Be Given This Evening," *Seattle Daily Times*, 22 April 1912.

⁶ Note that both Florence Easton and Putnam Griswold are Americans. Additionally, a third American singer, Lucy Gates, appeared as the "Spirit of Winter." Information from "Berlin Welcomes the First Serious American Opera," *New York Times*, 10 April 1910; "America's First Assault upon Berlin," *Current Literature* 48, no. 6 (June 1910): 659; and Hipsher, *American Opera*, 339.

APPENDIX D: Books of Opera Synopses

One compelling source with which to gauge the reach of new American operas into a broader public, beyond those who attended performances, is found in the numerous opera guidebooks and collections of opera synopses published for a general readership in the early decades of the twentieth century. These books provide significant clues into perceptions of the artistic significance of a given work in the years following its premieres. If an opera was selected for inclusion, then the author must have been convinced of the work's lasting importance or of the likelihood of it becoming a part of the established repertoire. Once a work was no longer performed or when the chances of future performances seemed doubtful, then an author was unlikely to include a discussion of that opera. By tracing both when particular operas first appear in these books and when they are no longer included in later publications or editions, one can indirectly measure how long these works retained their place in the nation's operatic consciousness.

In the 1910s and 1920s, it was widely assumed that educated, informed persons would be at least somewhat familiar with the mainstream operatic repertoire. Comments like the following assertion from J. Walker McSpadden in 1911 are not uncommon: "Indeed, a knowledge of the standard operas is as essential nowadays as a knowledge of the classics of literature."¹ Likewise, Paul Kies in 1920 encouraged the teaching of opera libretti in high school-level literature courses because, in his opinion, "A person who lays claim to any culture whatever must now know Aida and Lucia in addition to Hamlet and Macbeth."² The opera guidebook, generally a collection of

¹ J. Walker McSpadden, *Opera Synopses: A Guide to the Plots and Characters of the Standard Operas* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1911), iii.

² Paul P. Kies, "The Teaching of Opera Librettos," *The English Journal* 9, no. 2 (February 1920): 72.

synopses of the standard repertoire operas, aimed to familiarize average readers with this material. The foreword to Frederick Martens' *A Thousand and One Nights of Opera* provides a representative example of the overall authorial intent behind such volumes. He directed his book towards "the general reader, the opera goer, the music student and members of music clubs" and sought to include "the operas worth notice from early times to our own."³ One might "study up" with one of these books to prepare for attending an opera in person, or one might use these books as a reference when listening to gramophone records or radio broadcasts in the home. The title page of Henry Mason's *Opera Stories* recognized that "Most persons attending an opera wish to know only its story without reading its entire libretto."⁴ Even more specifically, George Upton noted that the revised edition of his *The Standard Operas* was "prepared for the general public rather than for musicians" and explained that his primary aim was to "give musically uneducated lovers of opera a clear understanding of the works they are likely to hear, and thus heighten their enjoyment."⁵

Not simply content to discuss the canonic masterworks of the past, many of these books sought to include contemporary examples as well, even if that task required a certain amount of guesswork in predicting which new operas would retain a significant place in the repertoire. The eighth edition of *The Victor Book of the Opera* explains: "It has been our aim to make the present edition ... as representative as possible by including all the standard operas regularly in the repertoire and the newer operas that *seem to be* of permanent interest" (emphasis added).⁶ This

³ Frederick H. Martens, *A Thousand and One Nights of Opera* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1926), v.

⁴ Henry L. Mason, ed., *Opera Stories*, expanded ed. (Cincinnati: Willis Music Co., 1920), n.p.

⁵ George P. Upton, *The Standard Operas: Their Plots and Their Music*, rev. ed. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1914), vii–viii.

⁶ Samuel Holland Rous, ed., *The Victor Book of the Opera*, 8th ed. (Camden, N.J.: Victor Talking Machine Co., 1929), 11.

notion of “permanent interest” was of course a fluid one. If an opera faded from the operatic scene, then it would consequently cease to appear in this type of book in later years, even if it had previously been a regular inclusion.

The following annotated bibliography presents in chronological order the representative selection of books examined in this survey. Commentary is followed by a listing of the American works included in each book, with any of my six focal operas appearing in boldface.

1904 — Charles Annesley, *The Standard Opera Glass: Detailed Plots of the Celebrated Operas*, revised edition, with a “Prelude” by James Hunecker (New York: Brentano’s)

This book includes not one single American opera, not even a single English-language opera. Here, one can easily see what little progress American opera had made by 1904. Recent efforts by Walter Damrosch (*The Scarlet Letter*, stage premiere in 1896), George Whitefield Chadwick (*Judith*, stage premiere in 1901), and John Knowles Paine (*Azara*, concert performance with piano in 1903) were apparently quickly forgotten, obviously neither “standard” nor “celebrated” enough to make the cut.

1911 — J. Walker McSpadden, *Opera Synopses: A Guide to the Plots and Characters of the Standard Operas* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell)

Only three American operas here, but already McSpadden includes both *The Sacrifice* and *Natoma*, particularly noteworthy for a book with a copyright date from the same year that these two operas were premiered. This volume provides information about the premieres and cast lists in addition to detailed plot synopses.

Included American operas: **Converse: *The Sacrifice***, **Herbert: *Natoma***, Parker: *Mona*

1914 — George P. Upton, *The Standard Operas: Their Plots and Their Music*, revised edition (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co.)

Upton notably includes a certain amount of commentary and critical discussion of the operas included in his book, especially for the more recent works. Regarding these, Upton provides the caveat that “it is as yet uncertain whether some of them will become ‘standard’ in the strict sense of that word” (vii).

Included American operas: Converse: *The Pipe of Desire*, **Converse: *The Sacrifice***, **Herbert: *Natoma***, Parker: *Mona*

1919 — Gustav Kobbé, *The Complete Opera Book* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons)

Despite his claim that “no really distinguished achievement has as yet been reached in the world of American opera” (836), Kobbé still includes eleven American works here, the first edition of this most famous of all opera guides.⁷

Included American operas: Breil: *The Legend*, **Cadman: Shanewis**, Converse: *The Sacrifice* and *The Pipe of Desire*, Damrosch: *Cyrano de Bergerac*, DeKoven: *The Canterbury Pilgrims* and *Rip Van Winkle*, Hadley: *Cleopatra's Night*, **Herbert: Natoma**, Hugo: *The Temple Dancer*, Parker: *Mona*

1920 — Henry L. Mason, ed., *Opera Stories*, expanded edition (Cincinnati: Willis Music Co.)

This basic reference work gives only plot summaries and adds no commentary or introductory material, despite presenting the most inclusive list of American works yet to appear in a book of this type. In its “expanded edition,” additional contemporary works occupy three separate “addenda.”

Included American operas: **Cadman: Shanewis**, Converse: *The Pipe of Desire*, Damrosch: *Cyrano de Bergerac*, DeKoven: *The Canterbury Pilgrims* and *Rip Van Winkle*, Florida: *Paoletta*, **Hadley: Azora**, Bianca and *Cleopatra's Night*, **Herbert: Natoma** and *Madeleine*, Hugo: *The Temple Dancer*, Nevin: *A Daughter of the Forest* and *Twilight*,⁸ Parelli: *A Lover's Quarrel*, Parker: *Fairyland*

1921 — Leo Melitz, *The Opera Goer's Complete Guide*, translated by Richard Salinger, revised and expanded by Louise Wallace Hackney (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Company)

This edition of a long-running European guidebook was revised specifically for the U. S. market. A publisher's note explains: “The work has been adapted for use in America by the elimination of a few operas seldom performed here and the addition of a number of modern operas in which the American public have perhaps a greater contemporary interest” (v). The revision added nine recent American works. *Shanewis* receives a curiously inaccurate single paragraph, while *Natoma* is treated to an unusually detailed summary.

Included American operas: Breil: *The Legend*, **Cadman: Shanewis**, Converse: *The Pipe of Desire*, Damrosch: *Cyrano de Bergerac*, DeKoven: *The Canterbury Pilgrims* and *Rip Van Winkle*, Hadley: *Cleopatra's Night*, **Herbert: Natoma**, Hugo: *The Temple Dancer*, Parker: *Mona*

⁷ The most recent edition continues the thorough coverage of American works—despite the British editors who currently helm the project—but the earliest is Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. See Earl of Harewood and Anthony Peattie, eds., *The New Kobbé's Opera Book*, 11th ed. (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 2000).

⁸ These two operas by Arthur Nevin are in fact the same work, even though both are included separately. Nevin retitled the work *A Daughter of the Forest* when he revised it for a production in Chicago. Curiously, the two synopses are not identical; see pages 92 and 135.

1925 — The University Society, “Stories of the Operas,” 349–415, and “Stories of Modern Operas,” 416–29, in *The International Library of Music: Music Literature, Vol. IV: The Opera—History and Guide* (New York: The University Society)

The arrangement in these two encyclopedia-type entries is alphabetical by opera title, with the American works appearing as equals alongside the European repertoire. These highly selective articles, aimed at student musicians, attempt to include only the most historically significant of American operas. Curiously, *Poia* somehow earned a place despite being nearly two decades old and never having been staged in the United States. Clearly its European production was taken as a mark of distinction.

Included American operas: **Cadman: Shanewis**, Converse: *The Pipe of Desire*, **Herbert: Natoma**, **Nevin: Poia**, Parker: *Mona*

1926 — Frederick H. Martens, *A Thousand and One Nights of Opera* (New York: Appleton)

This curious book in fact makes mention of over 1500 individual works, mostly operas but also some ballets. The organization is topical, based upon a “historic sequence” derived from the content of an opera or ballet’s plot. Martens attempts to illustrate world history as depicted in the works of the musical stage. Two features in particular make this book especially noteworthy: In describing his authorial objectives, Martens states that he intends to both “give an idea of the principal operas of the Modern and Ultra-Modern repertoire” and “to give an idea of the principal American operas, that is operas written by American composers” (v). Thus, his book includes more synopses of American operas than any other does, while at the same time it features examples of what was then the most cutting-edge modernism. For instance, Gershwin’s *Blue Monday* makes an unexpected appearance in a section on “twentieth century life and thought” (430, plot summary on 439).⁹ Some works receive detailed summaries while others merely get passing mention of their plot’s topic. However, this is the only such opera reference book located that includes plot summaries of all six of my focal operas.

Selective list of included American operas: Breil: *The Legend*, Bristow: *Rip Van Winkle*, Buck: *Deseret*, **Cadman: Shanewis** (plus four other works), Chadwick: *Judith*, Coerne: *Zenobia*, **Converse: The Sacrifice** (plus two others), Damrosch: *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *The Scarlet Letter*, DeKoven: five works in total, Fry: *Notre Dame de Paris*, Gershwin: *Blue Monday*, Gleason: *Montezuma*, **Hadley: Azora** (plus two others), **Herbert: Natoma** (plus two others), **Moore: Narcissa**, **Nevin: Poia** and *Daughter of the Forest*, Parker: *Mona* and *Fairyland*, Pratt: *Zenobia*, Redding: *Fay-Yen-Fa*, Sobolewski: *Mohega*

⁹ The work appears in Martens’ book under its original title, *135th Street*; I have opted here to use its more familiar modern title.

From this collection of books, there are two obvious “winners” in terms of perceived significance. Based solely upon regularity of their inclusion, *Natoma* and *Shanewis* clearly earned the greatest reputation. The synopses of both works appear in every book published in the years following their premieres. This unique status is understandable in both cases. Herbert’s success as an operetta songwriter made *Natoma* into an audience favorite, revived for many seasons and toured widely by the Chicago Opera Company. *Shanewis* was the first opera to remain in the Met’s repertoire for two consecutive seasons and was later revived at the Hollywood Bowl, where Cadman was very much a local celebrity. Nevertheless, such stellar reputations deflated rapidly as the late-Romantic musical style began to sound increasingly dated.

This rapid change of public tastes is perfectly illustrated in one additional published source for opera synopses, *The Victor Book of the Opera*. Issued in regularly revised editions starting in 1912 and continuing until 1968, these books were intended primarily as a listener’s guide to accompany the in-home “performance” of Victor-label gramophone records. Each opera’s synopsis is periodically interrupted by a listing of the available Victor records that illustrate the passage just described in the text. Thus, these books served a dual purpose: they were both reference work and catalog. The sales figures for these volumes are phenomenal. The company claimed that by the eighth edition of 1929, “more than three hundred thousand copies have been sold—a sale, we believe, in excess of that of any other book devoted to Grand Opera.”¹⁰ This total had ballooned to “more than 500,000 copies” by the printing of the tenth

¹⁰ *Victor Book of the Opera*, 8th ed., 11.

edition in 1939.¹¹ Indeed, it seems likely that more Americans learned about the plots of the great operas from the various editions of this book than from any other source.

Excerpts from American operas of course made up a relatively small proportion of Victor record releases, especially early in the company's history. In these books, one finds nowhere near the same extent of American coverage as found in several of the sources discussed above. However, because of the longevity of the publication, one can more easily examine the historical trends. Not a single American or English-language opera is included in the first edition of 1912, but in the revision of 1913, Herbert's *Natoma* and DeKoven's *Robin Hood* make their first appearances, along with a number of light operas by Sullivan, Wallace and Balfe. Herbert's second opera, *Madeleine*, joined these in the 1919 fifth edition, while *Natoma* received a new commentary and expanded synopsis in the 1924 seventh edition. Despite this privileging of *Natoma* in 1924, by the next edition in 1929, all three of these American works were removed and replaced with a synopsis of Deem Taylor's *The King's Henchman*, the only American work to appear in that volume.¹² Table D.1 below illustrates these trends.

Recall, as was earlier discussed, that Victor's editor sought to be "as representative as possible by including all the standard operas regularly in the repertoire and the newer operas that seem to be of permanent interest." By 1929, the Victor Company's recordings of excerpts from *Natoma* were approaching two decades old, performances were receding into memory, and hence its synopsis was due for omission. Indeed, the opera's star had been waning throughout the twenties, as the various editions of the book make clear. From 1911 to 1913, Victor recorded eleven sides worth of material from the opera, four of which are advertised in the 1913 edition

¹¹ Charles O'Connell, ed., *The Victor Book of the Opera*, 10th ed. (Camden, N.J.: RCA Manufacturing Company, 1939), 11.

¹² Note that one single editor, Samuel Holland Rous, managed the project through its first eight editions.

where *Natoma* is first included.¹³ Yet already by the fifth edition of 1919, listings for only two 12-inch records accompany the synopsis; this total is reduced to one in the 1924 seventh edition, the last in which *Natoma* appears, despite the newly written commentary and expanded synopsis.¹⁴

Editorship of *The Victor Book of the Opera* changed hands for the ninth edition's round of revisions.¹⁵ By 1936, the year this volume appeared, the soundworld of American opera was strikingly more eclectic and modern. The older generation was all but forgotten with younger composers taking their place. This edition includes Howard Hanson's *Merry Mount*, Richard Hageman's *Caponsacchi*, and again Taylor's *The King's Henchman*—representing the post- or neo-Romantic aesthetic that replaced the European-rooted late-Romanticism of my six focal operas. Alongside these still conservative works, two synopses for forward-looking American operas now appear. Indeed, Louis Gruenberg's expressionist *Emperor Jones* and Gershwin's jazzy *Porgy and Bess* both took the genre in entirely new directions.

¹³ Recording data from the searchable "Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings," online at <<http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/>>.

¹⁴ See pages 291–3 in the 2nd ed., page 270 in the 5th ed., and page 287 in the 7th ed.

¹⁵ Charles O'Connell, ed., *The Victor Book of the Opera*, 9th ed. (Camden, N.J.: RCA Manufacturing Company, 1936).

Table D.1. American Works Included in
The Victor Book of the Opera

EDITION	1 st , 1912	Rev. ed., 1913	5 th , 1919	7 th , 1924	8 th , 1929
OPERA	(does not include any American Operas)			“rewritten and revised”	“rewritten and revised”
Herbert: <i>Natoma</i>		newly added	repeat of previous material	new commentary and expanded synopsis	(removed)
DeKoven: <i>Robin Hood</i>		newly added	repeat of previous material	repeat of previous material	(removed)
Herbert: <i>Madeleine</i>			newly added	repeat of previous material	(removed)
Taylor: <i>The King’s Henchman</i>					newly added , only American opera in the entire book

APPENDIX E: Index of Music Examples in Chapter 5

The lists below are sorted by work and are presented in the order in which the excerpts occur in each opera. Parenthetical page numbers refer to the published piano-vocal scores. The right hand column gives the page number on which the example appears in this dissertation.

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