



MANON LESCAUT

Composer Giacomo Puccini and Lyrics by Anonymous (was originally drafted by Marco Praga (1862-1929) and Domenico Oliva (1860-1917); it was reworked, first by Ruggero Leoncavallo and then by Luigi Illica, many more changes have followed over the years.)

Sung in Italian with English super titles

Family Information: *Moral circumstances.* This opera is full of wonderful musical elements; sung in Italian it may be hard for young children to understand, but well worth your time to discuss the story line and the moral consequences of the behavior of each character. Manon Lescaut reveals through her journey of self discovery the value and true nature of love.

Story in Four Acts

ACT ONE

In the town square of Amiens, soldiers and townspeople await the arrival of the stagecoach. A young student, Des Grieux, appears, but does not join his companions. At last the coach arrives and the young Manon Lescaut, her brother, the Sergeant Lescaut, and the Treasurer-General Geronte get off. Des Grieux is struck by Manon's beauty and engages her in conversation. His friend Edmondo discovers that the treasurer-general has arranged for a coach for a man and a young woman and informs Des Grieux. Des Grieux professes his love for Manon and persuades her to elope with him.

ACT TWO

Manon is now living in Geronte's house in Paris as his mistress. Manon has left Des Grieux for Geronte after their money ran out, but now she longs to return to her romantic life with Des Grieux. Geronte sends singers to Manon to praise her beauty. Geronte then, brings a dancing master, musicians, and some old friends. Manon is bored by them all. Geronte invites her to join him later on a stroll and all depart with him. Des Grieux, who has made money gambling, suddenly appears. Manon falls into his arms and they re-declare their love. Geronte discovers them and threatens them and finally leaves to summon the police. Lescaut arrives and warns them that Geronte has denounced Manon and that the police are on their way. However Manon wastes time gathering her jewels. Before they can escape, the police arrive, and she is arrested and imprisoned. But Des Grieux declares his intention to follow Manon even to the end of the world.

ACT THREE

A sentinel stands guard over a prison beside a harbor in Le Havre. Manon is in the prison, and Des Grieux and Lescaut have come to Le Havre to rescue her. Lescaut has bribed a sentry but all is in vain. The prisoners are taken on board for deportation to America in the early morning. As they pass by, Lescaut points out his sister to the citizens and tells them he knows her story. She was abducted from her young lover. Des Grieux attempts to walk by Manon's side, but the sergeant of the guard pushes him aside roughly. Des Grieux threatens him, and entreats Manon to cling to him. Urged on by Lescaut, the citizens take Des Grieux's part. The captain of the vessel suddenly appears, takes pity on Des Grieux and permits him to go on board for America. Des Grieux is overcome with joy as he and Manon embrace. Lescaut, leaves in astonishment.

ACT FOUR

Now in America night in a desolate spot in Louisiana. Manon and Des Grieux have been traveling a long distance without water, food, or shelter. Manon is exhausted and leans heavily on Des Grieux. She is in the last stages of weakness, and Des Grieux is beside himself with despair. He finds a resting place for her, and goes to look for water. Manon thinks he has forsaken her entirely, and feels there is now no hope for her at all. Only the tomb, she cries, can release her from her burden. Des Grieux comes back in time to be present at her last moments. She dies, declaring her love for him. Des Grieux falls senseless on her body.

Famous Numbers:

L'amor?! L'amor?!	(Love?! Love?!)
Tra voi belle, brune e bionde	(Now Among You)
Ma bravo!	
Donna non vidi mai	(Never Did I Behold)
In quelle trine morbide	(In Those Silken Curtains)
Madrigale—Sulla vetta del monte	(Speed O'er Summit)
Ah! Manon, mi tradisce	(Manon, Kind and Gentle)

Famous Intermezzo between Act I and II

No! No! pazzo son	(No! No! I am crazy!)
Ansia eterna, crudel	(Eternally Cruel)
All'armi! All'armi!	(Lamplighter's Song)
Manon, senti, amor mio	(Manon, Please love me)
Sola, perduta, abbandonata	(Alone and Abandoned)
Fra le tue braccia, amore	(In the embrace of love)

Educational and Artistic Value of *Into the Woods*

By Pamela Gee

Opera by Children Education Associate

Manon Lescaut, the tragic principal character, suffers self-inflicted torment through her inability to understand the true moral fiber of love. The opera is a clear artistic exploration of worldliness and passions as opposed to true devotion and moral values. It also seeks to explore society which breeds a desire for luxury over human relationships along with the role of women and their treatment in society. Manon is a byproduct of the environment in which she lives, influenced by her world's view of pleasures having more value than anything else. Beauty she possesses, and it is her beauty that seems to be her bane. Her youth and beauty combined give her father cause to commit her to a life in a convent. She is not so willing to along with the plan. She is passively aggressive and willingly speaks to a young man—a student and stranger. She goes around rules of decorum in hopes that she may avert the intended plan. Manon plays the part and passion of love at first sight as the young student Chevalier Des Grieux falls completely in love with her. Her brother, Sergeant Lescaut, seems to have no scruples, as he willingly reveals her affection for luxury to the old family friend, Geronte, to manipulate his riches toward his own situation. So, Geronte plans to abduct the young Manon.

The lack of moral vision of the characters continues as Des Grieux usurps Geronte's planned abduction and makes it an elopement. Sergeant Lescaut predicts aptly, that as soon as Des Grieux's money is gone Manon will be lured back to Geronte with promises of riches. Holding true to her familial values and the hope of a life of luxury, she leaves Des Grieux when his money runs out. Geronte is lavish in his expressions of love by bestowing gifts of jewels, expensive dresses, and entertainments. This merriment is tainted by her wistful longings for her ingénue naiveté and love, yet she is obviously enjoying her emergence in society as a courtesan. She is bored with the trite novelties of music, dance, and entertainments, yet she wishes for fulfillment and does not know how to achieve it. Her brother is enjoying the association with money and encourages Manon in her exploits. Manon still does not understand that there is no real love in the life she has chosen. Des Grieux in the throws of passion desperately seeks to gain her affections back though he now understands where her heart lies. He must have money to reclaim her affection and seeks to gain money quickly by gambling. Manon discovers she does love Des Grieux, but her love of money and luxury is not overcome even as she decides to leave Geronte because she refuses to leave behind her jewels. She flees from Geronte's abode with as many jewels as she can grasp, but this is her ruin. She is arrested as a thief. Society at that time did not view her as the owner, though they were given to her, women did not own anything. This demonstrates the result of her choice to live with Geronte—she chose to be an object owned, bought at a price. This leads to desperate despair as she is imprisoned and sentenced for deportation to America. Des Grieux continues to follow his heart and pledges to be true to Manon. He enlists the help of her brother who shows his first glimpse of quality as he attempts to assist Des Grieux in a rescue. Though all attempts to save Manon fail, Des Grieux manages to board the ship to America.

Manon, now in a place where there is no society, a barren environment with little sustenance for life, realizes what true love really is. Manon, thinking clearly for the first time, with a sense of morals and values she failed to recognize while under society's influence, discovers that true love is not passion but devotion—a sense of care beyond oneself that matters. Love is not wealth, but a connection with another human being. Unfortunately this revelation comes too late for her happiness. Des Grieux, who has sacrificed everything for Manon's sake, holds her in his arms as hunger and fatigue overtake her. She comes to understand and acknowledge true love will never die.

The music is glorious in its depiction of the struggle between survival, love and society, which heightens every moment of the opera from luxury to inner turmoil to self-discovery. It demonstrates musically the tragedy of human frailty.