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DEBORAH BURTON

A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY:
PUCCINI'S "MOTIVO DI PRIMA INTENZIONE"
AND ITS APPLICATIONS IN *MANON LESCAUT*,
LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST AND *SUOR ANGELICA*

Not so long ago, Roger Parker wrote that «Puccini represents a last outpost against the rigours of music theory».¹ His phrase still conjures up images of an onslaught of fierce but determined theorists armed with *Ursätze* and *Grundgestalten*, brutally assaulting the Puccini fort. The small band of analysts who have been tempted to study this repertoire, however, might prefer to think of their quests as expeditions or journeys of discovery.² Despite some recent inroads, not many hardy pioneers have explored this composer's musical territory, no doubt because of the seemingly impassable obstacles that present themselves at first or even second glance: the scores are thickets of unresolved dissonances, unexpected changes of key, sudden leitmotivic appearances, shifting rhythms and meters and, most problematically, motions to keys remote from the original or final tonic. How is one to make musical sense, for instance, of the musical passage from *Suor Angelica* shown in Example 1, in which

¹ R. PARKER, *Analysis: Act I in Perspective*, in *Giacomo Puccini: Tosca*, ed. M. Carner, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 118.

² A selected list of theoretical studies of Puccini might include the following works (alphabetically by author): A. ATLAS, *Crossed Stars and Crossed Tonal Areas in Puccini's "Madama Butterfly"*, «19th Century Music», 14, 1990; D. BURTON, *An Analysis of Puccini's Tosca: a heuristic approach to the unifying elements of the opera*, Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995; A. DAVIS, [no title, structural analysis of *Turandot*], Ph.D. diss. (in progress), Indiana University - Bloomington; W. DRABKIN, *The musical language of "La bohème"*, in GIACOMO PUCCINI, *La bohème*, eds. A. Groos and R. Parker, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 80-101; F. FERRARI, *Il linguaggio melodico di Puccini nella drammaturgia di "Bobème", "Tosca" e "Madama Butterfly"*, diss., Università degli Studi di Bologna, 1989-90; M. GIRARDI, *Giacomo Puccini: L'arte internazionale di un musicista italiano*, Venice, Marsilio, 1995; H. GREENWALD, *Dramatic Exposition and Musical Structure in Puccini's Operas*. Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1991; R. LEIBOWITZ, *Histoire de l'Opéra*, Paris, Corrèa, 1957; Italian ed., *Storia dell'Opera*, Milano, Garzanti, 1966; A. MANDELLI, *La logica del West (appunti su un finale di Puccini)*, «Rassegna Musicale Curci», 30, no. 1, 1977, pp. 19-21; A. TITONE, *Vissi d'arte: Puccini e il disfacimento del melodramma*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1972. For a more complete bibliographic list, as of 1999, see L. FAIRTILE, *Giacomo Puccini: A Guide to Research*, New York, Garland, 1999.

the harmony shifts from C# minor to E major to C major to F# half-diminished to E minor, all on one page?

Ex. 1 - *Suor Angelica* 52/0 - 53/0.

52 Andante mesto

Tutto ho of-fer-to al-la gi-ne, si, tut-to; ma v'è un'of-fer-ta che non pos-so fa-re: al-la Ma-dre so-a-ve del-le Ma-dri, non pos-so of-fi-re di scordar... mio fi-glio!

C# minor vii #7/E E major

C major C major F# half-diminished 7th

E minor F# half-dim. 7 E minor

53 (gridato/ shouting)

This passage will be examined below from a fresh perspective, which hopefully will shed light on the logic behind its composition. But it is understandable, given such obstacles, that many would-be analysts have turned back from the challenge and even denied the value of a search for tonal coherence itself, seeing, instead of a clear path, only a confusing labyrinth of harmonies.

The longest journeys start with a single step, but the difficulty is often the setting-out. As Puccini said:

La difficoltà è, per me, cominciare un'opera, trovare cioè la sua atmosfera musicale. Quando l'inizio è fissato e composto, non c'è più da aver paura: l'opera è decisa e cammina.³

³ G. ADAMI, *Puccini*, Milan, Fratelli Treves, 1935, p. 103.

[The difficulty for me is beginning an opera, finding, that is, its musical atmosphere. Once the beginning is fixed and composed, there is nothing more to fear: the opera has been determined and it goes.]

And Carner reports that «nearly always Puccini begins with what he called “il motivo di prima intenzione”, the motto theme embodying the work’s essential spirit».⁴ In most of Puccini’s operas, these opening statements appear before the curtain opens and thus focus the listener’s ear on the aural landscape before any visual cues are given.⁵ So, if these opening statements embody the work’s «essential spirit» as Carner says, then they set the work’s musical essence as well as its dramatic one.

But if we read Puccini’s statement above closely, we find that he is implying two different sorts of beginnings: he must create the music with which to begin the opera, but also that this process must be the chronologically first act of composition. In short, he starts to compose at the very beginning.⁶ What would happen if we were to take Puccini at his word, and explore his works by considering the opening motives (or preludes) to his operas both as the first sounds heard and also as representative of the (chronologically) first schemata upon which Puccini layered his musical structures? Tracing the «motivo di prima intenzione» or «motive of first intention or plan» (hereafter “MPT”) could not, of course, explain every nuance of the completed operatic score, if only because Puccini’s selection of the word «prima» implies that there were certain to follow second, third or more plans, developed perhaps in response to the exigencies of the drama, to accommodate bits of added local color (such as borrowed pre-existing tunes), or even practical considerations (e.g., transpositions for singers). Certainly the dramatic pull of operatic composition would lead to various harmonic and leitmotivic sidetrips, which in some cases, such as in Example 1 above, might seem as inexorably tractional as a patch of quicksand.⁷ Nevertheless, an original itinerary might be traceable.

⁴ M. CARNER, *Puccini: a Critical Biography*, New York, Holmes and Meier, 2nd. ed., 1974, rep. 1988, p. 286. This concept is very close to both the Schoenbergian «Grundgestalt» and Rudolph Reti’s «prime thought»; see A. SCHOENBERG, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, eds. G. Strang and L. Stein, London, Faber and Faber, 1970 and R. RETI, *The Thematic Process in Music*, 1st ed. 1951; reprint, New York, Macmillan, 1978.

⁵ Puccini uses pre-curtain preludes in nine of his twelve operas: *Le Villi*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly* (a fugato!), *La Fanciulla del West*, *La Rondine*, *Suor Angelica*, *Gianni Schicchi* and *Turandot*.

⁶ For *Tosca*, we know that Puccini composed the prelude first, as he dated it and the rest of the opera’s large formal units upon completion.

⁷ As Schoenberg has written, «Deviation into remote [harmonic] regions often occurs in

The three analyses below examine the technical ramifications of the MPI in early, middle and late Puccini operas: *Manon Lescaut* (1893, his first international success), *La Fanciulla del West* (1910, his self-proclaimed first «modern» opera⁸), and *Suor Angelica* (1918, second of three one-act operas comprising *Il Trittico*, his last complete work). Taken into consideration here are the smallest particles as well as the largest structures of the operas – an eagle’s eye view of this musical terrain. The effects of the MPI come in two orders of magnitude, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic. Hence, in each opera, the MPI will be seen to function microcosmically, as the motivic source of the «cellule tematiche» [«thematic cells»] from which most of the opera’s melodic content derives,⁹ and macrocosmically as the large-scale design or musical ‘itinerary’ of the musical odyssey of each opera. The paths of the musical meanderings may be twisted, but if one examines the musico-dramatic arrival points, a clearer picture of the whole comes into view: a composing-out of the MPI on a gigantic scale.

The microcosmic thematic cells should be immediately perceivable, as they are close at hand, right on the surface of the composition, even though they are subjected to a process of thematic transformation: the same motivic bits are given new ‘contextual clothes’. For example, a recognizable melody or melody fragment could appear with altered rhythm, harmony or dynamics.¹⁰ However, it may not be possible to hear between

descriptive music»; A. SCHOENBERG, *Structural Functions in Music*, ed. L. Stein, New York, W. W. Norton, 1969, p. 80.

⁸ As early as February 1905, Puccini wrote to Ricordi that he wanted his next opera (after *Madama Butterfly*) to be more modern: «Ho avuto tanta smania di andare avanti. Ma avanti, non indietro! Con un lavoro modernamente costruito e sentito». [«I longed very much to go ahead. But ahead, not back! With a work that was constructed and felt in a modern way.»] G. ADAMI, ed., *Giacomo Puccini: Epistolario*, Milan, Mondadori, 1982, p. 98.

⁹ This or similar terminology is employed in analyses by BURTON, TITONE, FERRARI and GIRARDI, *opp. cit.*, although many other writers mention the interrelationship of the motivic material in Puccini’s operas. See, for example, W. ASHBROOK, *The Operas of Puccini*, 2nd ed., Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985; J. MAEDHER, *Roma anno 1800. Riflessioni sulla struttura drammatico-musicale dell’opera storica in Puccini*, in *49° Maggio Musicale Fiorentino*, 1986, Program of Teatro Comunale di Firenze (1986), pp. 1037-1055, and PARKER, *op. cit.*, 141.

¹⁰ This is, of course, a dangerous course upon which to embark. Too many analyses, including those of Reti, find thematic connections in unlikely places and, ultimately, fail to convince. There must be some criteria for limiting the connections suggested, since, as Lerdahl and Jackendoff note, «Given any two sets of pitches and durations, it is possible logically to “transform” one into the other, and to do so in any number of ways»; cfr. F. LERDAHL and R. JACKENDOFF, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1983, p. 286. Therefore, this discussion will be limited to exact repetitions of intervallic patterns (which include inversions and retrogrades) that can be altered only by mode (a minor third can be seen as a transformed major third, etc.). Further, there will be no search for concealed repetitions: all of the examples here exist completely and uninterruptedly on the musical surface. The nature of

acts of an opera in order to recognize the expanded MPI as large-scale design; but, even so, it does not follow that the structure is not in existence. Once these motivic elaborations have been identified, one may find that the musical topographies of 18th-Century France, mid-19th-Century California and 17th-Century Italy are not all that diverse.

Manon Lescaut

Let us now turn to *Manon Lescaut*, a relatively early work. Example 2 shows the first section of the opera's 28-bar, pre-curtain prelude. In A major, the opening gesture consists of an arpeggiation of that harmony: E - A - E - C#. Both this arpeggiation figure and the opening intervals of the perfect fourth will become sources for development of prominent surface material. In these first twelve bars, note (for future reference) that there is a peculiar emphasis on the pitch class F# in bars 6, 7, 8 and 10, especially in its relationship to E: F# will be the ultimate tonic of the opera.

Ex. 2 - *Manon Lescaut*, opening of the prelude, I/0/0-11.¹¹

Allegro brillante

ff < E - A - E - C# >

A major

thematic transformation, however, precludes the elimination of possible connections on the basis of a different harmonic or metric context: it is, in fact, the point of these transformations to create new (and clever) contexts for the same patterns.

¹¹ All musical examples are identified as to location in the score by act / rehearsal number / measures after rehearsal number, with the exception of those examples from *Suor Angelica*, which are labeled, because of the opera's one-act length, simply with rehearsal number / measures after rehearsal number.

Ex. 2 (continued).

In the next examples, we can see how the motivic elements of the opening gesture are manifested on the immediately perceptible, microscopic musical level. Examples 3a-c show prominent instances of the rising-falling perfect fourth and Examples 3d-f contain retrograde versions of the arpeggiation figure.¹²

Ex. 3a-c - *Manon Lescaut*, perfect fourths, at I/58/10-16, III/11/0-2 and IV/9/21-10/3.

a)

b)

¹² See GIRARDI, *op. cit.*, pp. 86 ff., for a similar discussion.

c)

< perfect fourths >

ff *pp*

So - la... per - duta, abban - do - na - ta!

< perfect fourths >

Ex. 3d-f - *Manon Lescaut*, arpeggio figures in retrograde, at I/16/0-3, II/9/3-5, II/20/12-21.

d)

< arpeggiation figure >

p

Tra voi, bel - le brune e bian - de si na - sconde

e)

< arpeggiation figure >

p

Per me lu lot - ti

f)

< arpeggiation figure >

p

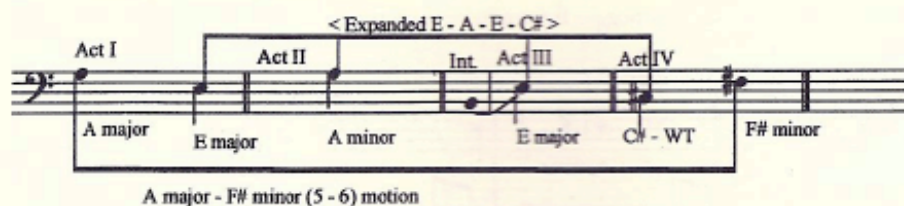
L'ora, o Tyr - si, è ve - ga e bella

One could argue that these intervals are not unusual and certainly are common to many musical works, even other Puccini operas. While this is true, the numerous and frequent occurrences of these particular figures within a single work would seem argue for some sort of compositional intent.

Now let us take our bird's eye view of *Manon's* landscape (and let's hope we see it more accurately than Prévost and the librettists did!) There is no Louisiana desert here, but we can make out an itinerary

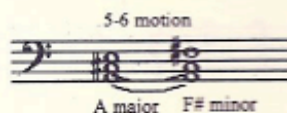
whose arrival points – the final tonics of the first three acts – are E major, A minor and E major, a giant expansion of the opening gesture, E - A - E. Further, if we combine this pattern with the whole-tone complex on C# at IV/25/6, which substitutes for the dominant of the F# minor tonic, we get the full arpeggio pattern, E - A - E - C#. ¹³ Example 4 shows a diagram of the opera – our map – on which this itinerary is laid out.

Ex. 4 - *Manon Lescaut*, global expansion of E - A - E - C#.



If one were to reduce the tonal motion of this opera even further, to just the beginning and end points of the entire operatic journey, the result would be a transition from the opening A major tonality to the closing F# minor one, in essence a 5-6 motion, E - F#, over A.

Ex. 5 - *Manon Lescaut*, reduction of overall harmonic motion.



Hence the motivic juxtaposition of E and F# noted above. As the opera progresses, unusual moves from E to F# or F# to E will take center stage. Examples 6a-c show F# - E's prominent appearances at the end of Act III and at the opening and closing of Act IV. ¹⁴ Note that the F# minor seventh chord heard near the close of Act III contains all the pitch classes of both primary chords, A major and F# minor: F#, A, C# and E. The final motion from F#7 to E actually bypasses a dominant (which would be B major), an elision that emphasizes the motivic connection even fur-

¹³ The orchestral interlude between Acts II and III is omitted in this schema, since its final tonic (B major) can be considered a large-scale dominant to E major, the Act III tonic, which is implied but actually avoided in that act's conclusion. (The harmony at that point moves directly from F#7 to E, another motivic juxtaposition of the E-F# pair.)

¹⁴ From this, we can extrapolate the reason for the ubiquity of the interval of a major second on the musical surface. In another sense, however, the major second is a shortening of the heroine's personal leitmotiv.

ther. The conclusion of the opera, as seen above, contains the whole-tone complex on C# at IV/25/6, also eliding a true dominant: this sonority (G-A-C#-E#) contains the pitch class of the dominant, C#, but also the motivically pivotal one, A.¹⁵ And the plaintive descending second, F# - E and their parallel harmonies, is almost like the orchestra crying out "Manon". The heroine, when she first appears, announces her full name to a descending stepwise fourth, but by the last act we are on a first-name (two-note) basis with her.

To make a short digression in our analytical journey, it should be noted that similar motivic techniques can be found in the works of Beethoven, a composer whom Puccini – like most 19th-century composers – admired greatly.¹⁶ To consider Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, for

Ex. 6 - *Manon Lescaut*, appearances of F#E.

a) conclusion of Act III.

fff

F#7 F#7 inv. F#7 E major

<F# - E>

b) opening of Act IV.

Andante sost.

pp ff pp ff pp

<F# - E> <F# - E>

<F# - E - F# - E - F#>

¹⁵ The intervallic content of this sonority, an augmented triad plus a major second, is also present in the opening of *La Fanciulla del West*, an opera written some seventeen years later. This later opera is discussed at length below.

¹⁶ Apparently, Puccini's admiration of Beethoven lasted all his life. Ugo Ojetti, has left us this first-hand report of his visit to Puccini during his last days at home in Viareggio, an account that shows how dearly Puccini held the inspiration of past masters: «To-day, here he is in his house, in his ground-floor studio, between me and his great shiny-black piano. [...] The

Ex. 6 (continued).

c) conclusion of Act IV.

example, the last movement begins with the terrible cacophony of D minor played against B \flat major, the clashing notes being A and B \flat , the fifth and flat sixth degrees of the D minor scale. Throughout the work, motives are derived from this juxtaposition (such as the opening of movement III) and the keys of the movements reflect it as well: I - D minor (with second theme in B \flat major), II - D minor, III - B \flat major, IV - D minor/B \flat major - D major. Overall, Beethoven creates a struggle between major and minor, represented in part by the contest between the fifth and sixth scale degrees. *Manon Lescaut* does the same. Thus the descriptions of this opera as 'symphonic' by Shaw and Leibowitz – despite the variable semantic content that word carries – do not conflict with the motivic elaboration described above. In fact, they confirm it.¹⁷

room is low, barely longer than the piano [...] Not even the photograph of a singer, not even the photograph of some dear colleague. Only an autograph of Rossini, inside a little mahogany frame. [...] On the music-stand, held in place by two little bronze tablets, one with the portrait of Beethoven, another with the portrait of Wagner, the last pages of his beloved *Turandot* are standing upright». The original text [U. OJETTI, *Cose Viste*, Florence, Sansoni, 1951, pp. 336-337] is as follows: «Oggi, eccolo nella sua casa, nel studio a terreno, tra me e il suo pianoforte nero lucente. [...] La stanza è bassa, poco più lunga del pianoforte; [...] Nemmeno la fotografia d'un cantante, nemmeno la fotografia d'un caro collega. Soltanto un autografo di Rossini, entro una cornicetta di mogano. [...] Sul leggìo, fermati da due targhette di bronzo, una col ritratto di Beethoven, una col ritratto di Wagner, stanno ritti gli ultimi fogli della cara *Turandot*».

¹⁷ Shaw wrote in his review of the London première of *Manon Lescaut*: «The first act ... is also unmistakably symphonic in its treatment. There is genuine symphonic modification, development, and occasionally combination of the thematic material, all in a dramatic way, but

La Fanciulla del West

We move now to the wide-open spaces and the frontier of gold-rush California, the setting for *La fanciulla del West*. The opera has a theme of redemption, selected by Puccini himself.¹⁸ This theme is made manifest musically by the interval of a rising major third, C to E.¹⁹ Looking at the macrocosmic tonal plan of the entire opera, we can see a giant, ascending C to E motive composed out in a manner similar to that which we have noted in *Manon Lescaut*: the first act begins and ends in C, the second moves from D major to E \flat minor, and the last act, while beginning in a tonally ambiguous manner, ends in E major. The struggle towards redemption is clearly a difficult, upwards climb.

Ex. 7 - *La Fanciulla del West*, macrocosmic expansion of C-E.



From where did this rising third spring? Intervals of a major third are presented both vertically (stacked) and horizontally (rising) in the opening measure of the MPI as part of a whole-tone complex that resolves only in the work's coda, at III/44/9.

also in a musically homogeneous way»; cfr. G. B. SHAW, *Music in London 1890-94*, London, n.p., 1950, III, p. 219. Quoted in ASHEROOK, *op. cit.*, p. 36. A more contemporary use of the word «symphonic» is by Leibowitz, who outlines out a sonata form (although he labels it A-B-A') in the first scene of the opera. LEIBOWITZ, *op. cit.*, p.382-384.

¹⁸ Puccini, quoted in an interview, *Gazzetta di Torino*, 11 november 1911: «In Belasco's drama [...] a very small share was devoted to the redemptive element of the protagonist: it was I who wanted from the librettists a greater development of this [idea], so that this desire for purification, this difficult yearning towards a peace gained through love and action, would be more evident, more sincere». Quoted in GIRARDI, *Il finale de 'La Fanciulla del West' e alcuni problemi di codice*, «Opera & Libretto», II, Florence, Olschki, 1993, p. 435. [Original text: «Nel dramma di Belasco [...] era stata data assai piccola parte all'elemento redentore della protagonista: fui io che volli dai librettisti uno sviluppo maggiore di esso, onde apparisse più evidente, più sincero questo desiderio di purificazione, questo anelito affannoso verso una pace conquistata con l'amore e l'operosità»].

¹⁹ Girardi sees the theme of «love pushed towards redemption» represented by a brief melodic figure at I/111/5. GIRARDI, *op. cit.*, p. 306. A case could also be made for the MPI being simply the major thirds and major second of the opening sonority, since the construction of the prelude itself is based upon those elements.

Ex. 8 - *La Fanciulla del West*, prelude, with thematic cells.

The musical score is presented in five systems, each consisting of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

- System 1:** Starts with a boxed measure number **I/0/0**. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final note. The left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamic markings include *ff* and *M2 >*. Above the staff, the interval sequence **<C - E - D - C>** is indicated.
- System 2:** Continues the melodic and bass lines. The right hand features a series of eighth-note chords. The left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata.
- System 3:** Continues the melodic and bass lines. The right hand features a series of eighth-note chords. The left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata.
- System 4:** Starts with a boxed measure number **I/1/0**. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamic markings include *ff*, *p*, and *ff > p*.
- System 5:** Continues the melodic and bass lines. The right hand features a series of eighth-note chords. The left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata.

Ex. 8 (continued).

Musical score for Ex. 8 (continued), consisting of three systems of piano accompaniment. The first system features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a harmonic line. A box containing the number '11/11' is positioned above the final measure of the first system. The second system begins with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic marking. The third system includes a *rit.* (ritardando) marking and a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking. The score concludes with a fermata over the final measure.

Ex. 9 - *La Fanciulla del West*, coda, III/44/9 - end.

Musical score for Ex. 9, consisting of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is marked *Lentamente* and *pp* (pianissimo). It includes a *rit.* (ritardando) marking and a *ppp* (pianississimo) dynamic marking. The score concludes with a fermata over the final measure. Below the first system, the following chordal analysis is provided: whole-tone on C, E major, WT, E major, WT. Below the second system, the following chordal analysis is provided: E major, WT, E major.

Ex. 9 (continued).

But let us look more closely at the prelude. The first sonority is comprised of the augmented triad C - E - G \sharp over a B \flat bass. Two of the three thematic cells discussed herein are intervallic subsets of this combination: the major second (B \flat - C, or G \sharp (A \flat) - B \flat) and the open (usually major) third (C - E, E - G \sharp , or G \sharp (A \flat) - C). The third thematic cell is derived from a combination of these two: an ascending leap of a major third followed by two descending whole steps, hereafter the 'do-mi-re-do pattern': we hear this pattern in the first four melodic pitch classes, C - E - D - C. These are all indicated in Example 8.

The musical surface of the opera exhibits these motivic patterns in a number of ways. The 'local color' Puccini borrows, in fact, conforms to this primary thematic material: he includes, for example, the refrain from Stephen Foster's "Camptown Races" («doo-dah»), which is set, in the original, to a descending major second.²⁰ (The first part of the pentatonic tune, unquoted, is also a combination of thirds and seconds.) With some irony, Puccini quotes the refrain in inversion, as an ascending major second. Below, in Examples 10a-c, are several selections of *La fanciulla* foreground material based on the major second. Examples 10d-e and 10f-g show material derived from the other two thematic cells.²¹

Ex. 10a-c - *La Fanciulla del West*, major seconds at I/2/0-3, I/6/2-3 and I/17/5.

²⁰ Several non-American scholars have erroneously identified this song "Dooda Dooda Day".

²¹ Girardi also has a similar discussion. GIRARDI, *op. cit.*, pp. 294 ff.

b)

c)

Ex. 10d-c- *La Fanciulla del West*, open thirds at the Act I finale and II/0/5.

d)

e)

Ex. 10f-g - *La Fanciulla del West*, do-mi-re-do patterns at I/21/9 and I/99/6-7.

f)

< do-mi-re-do, retrograde >

The musical score for example f) consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with a 'do-mi-re-do, retrograde' pattern, indicated by an annotation above it. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/4.

g)

< do-mi-re-do >

The musical score for example g) consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with a 'do-mi-re-do' pattern, indicated by an annotation above it. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/4.

In order to fully appreciate how Puccini makes deeper use of this motivic material, though, we must study the construction of the entire thirty-five bar prelude. Puccini is very concerned in this opera, as elsewhere, with various ways to divide the octave into equal parts and the cyclic constructions that derive from those procedures. Thus, in the prelude, Puccini divides the whole-tone scale on C into two complementary augmented triads. One (C - E - G#), as we have seen, is stated vertically at the outset over the bass note B \flat ; the other (B \flat - D - F#) is presented horizontally, distributed temporally over the length of the prelude.²² Puccini has placed each "leg" of the B \flat - D - F# triad in the bass, at distances of approximately twelve measures, which divides the introduction roughly into thirds. The first of these thirds begins with the initial B \flat as a bass note. At rehearsal number I/1/0 the opening sonority recurs but now with F# in the bass. Lastly, at I/1/11, we have a pure D minor triad, with pitch class D in the bass. From this point, both the soprano and bass lines move through arpeggiations of the minor seventh D - F - A - C, to arrive at pitch class C at 1/17. Because in each leg of the arpeggiation, pitch class C is reasserted (it is the highest note at 0/0, 1/0 and 1/17), the prelude ultimately prolongs pitch class C.²³

²² Puccini has used the complementary whole-tone hexachord (C#D#F-G-A-B) as a type of dominant substitution, at I/03 and I/1/3.

²³ After the local tonic of C is reached at I/1/17, Puccini inserts a 'cakewalk' rhythm, for local color, built from major seconds and a retrograde do-mi-re-do pattern.

Ex. 11 - *La Fanciulla del West*, prelude, expanded motivic structures.

The musical score for Ex. 11 shows a vocal line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The vocal line is marked with the syllables <do-mi-re-do> above it. The piano accompaniment includes an augmented triad (Bb-F#-D) and a major ninth (M9) chord. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers I/1/0, I/1/11, and I/1/17 indicated. The piano accompaniment also includes a D minor - m7 chord and a C major chord.

In the larger design of this prelude, we can find each of the three thematic cells, also shown in Example 11. The vertical major ninth C - D at I/1/13 and (on a deeper level) the move from D minor through the minor seventh chord to C, derive from the major second neighbor motion, the first of our thematic cells. Immediately after the prelude, we hear E major; thus, there is a large-scale move from C to E, an enlargement (along with the expanded augmented triad) of the second motivic cell, the major third. We can also trace the expansion of our third motivic cell, C - E - D - C, here. C is reasserted over F# at I/1/0, and, seven bars later, the motion C - E is repeated twice in the soprano, accentuating pitch class E. This is followed by D in the soprano (emphasized with fermatas at I/1/11 and I/1/13) and then, finally, C at I/1/17.

These motivic resources are exploited throughout the first act of the opera, which is, in many aspects, a composing-out of the prelude's construction. Like the prelude, the act is divided roughly into three sections, reflecting musical (and dramatic) divisions. Those musico-dramatic units span 1) from the end of the prelude to the entrance of Minnie, the Girl herself (I/42, punctuated by a pistol shot), 2) from there to the entrance of Johnson-Ramerrez, bandit with a heart (I/72), and 3) from there to the end of the act, when the two fall in love.²⁴ At each of these articulation points, pitch class C is reasserted and thus, as in the prelude, C is effectively prolonged throughout: when Minnie enters, we hear 'her theme', which will return to close the act (discussed below) and which begins and ends in C; at Johnson's entrance, we hear the 'cakewalk' theme in C,²⁵ and the act ends on a surprising and evocative C major ninth.

²⁴ As with the cannon blast that marks the middle of the first act of *Tosca*, Puccini has not made his articulation points difficult to spot.

²⁵ After Johnson's entrance, the harmony moves directly to E major by way of the augmented triad C-E-G# (sung by Johnson as E-C-G#). Both the augmented triad and the move from C to E are motivically related to the MPI.

The stunning conclusion of the first act of *La fanciulla*, on a pianissimo major ninth chord was quite daring for an Italian opera composer of his time (even though several years earlier, in 1904, Puccini had ended both acts of the original *Madama Butterfly* with unresolved harmonies).²⁶ The theatrical effect produced here can only be described as 'ethereal', reflecting Minnie's recall of Johnson's words, «the face of an angel» and the dramatic theme of redemption. Motivically, it recalls the D - C major second interval we saw in the prelude, and the first thematic cell.²⁷ The presence of an unresolved D over the act's tonic C also looks ahead to the opening key of the next act and to the completion of the rising major third key plan. This large-scale tonal motion reaches the end of its trail - E major - at the end of the opera, as Minnie and Johnson, redeemed, ride off into the distance. [Example 10d above].

As Mandelli has noted, the final page of this act, shown above in Example 10d, is constructed on a cyclical descending bass pattern of minor thirds, C - A - F# - E♭ - C, forming an expanded diminished seventh chord.²⁸ However, what has not yet been noticed is that this sequence is yet another manner of dividing the octave into equal parts. Perhaps Puccini referred to techniques such as these when he wrote that *Fanciulla* would be «constructed and felt in a modern way»: ²⁹ the notion of dividing the octave into twelve independent chromatic tones was just down the road, but far enough beyond the boundaries of Puccini's musical world to escape his vision.

Suor Angelica

Now we travel back in time to the world of *Suor Angelica*, the middle member of Puccini's operatic triptych, *Il Trittico*. A delicate miniature set in a 17th-century Italian convent, this score exhibits the same organizing musical techniques discussed above, brought to a new level of

²⁶ Verdi's 1893 *Otello* begins with a dominant ninth chord on C, but there are no unresolved dissonances at the ends of the opera's acts.

²⁷ Pitch class B, the seventh of this ninth chord, is also prominently sounded here: on the deepest structural level this B is the fifth degree of the E major scale (the ultimate tonic) and is related to the B of the E major at 1/2. Thus, pitch class C, though it be the tonic of Act I, must ultimately be regarded as the lowered sixth scale degree of the opera's E major tonic, and upper neighbor to B. By presenting C and B simultaneously in such a prominent spot, Puccini emphasizes this relationship.

²⁸ MANDELLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 354-355.

²⁹ See note 8 above.

sophistication. Here as well, the surface motivic material springs from the opening motive: off-stage bells that commence with the pitches F - D - E - C.

Ex. 12 - *Suor Angelica*, prelude.



Ex. 13b - *Suor Angelica*, 60/1-3.

Lento grave < falling 3rds >

pp Sen - za mam - ma, o bim - bo, tu sei mor - to!

Ex. 13c - *Suor Angelica*, 10/5.

< falling 3rds >

The second of the opera's thematic cells, the double neighbor, are shown in their surface guises in Examples 14a-c:

Ex. 14a - *Suor Angelica*, double neighbor patterns, 25/7.

< double neighbor >

Ex. 14b - *Suor Angelica*, 26/6-8.

Andantino

< double neighbor >

p

Ex. 14c - *Suor Angelica*, 39/1-2.

The dotted rhythm that Puccini uses in much of the musical surface of *Suor Angelica* is also in evidence in some of the above examples.³²

Like each of the other operas we have examined so far, *Suor Angelica* also has a macrocosmic design derived from its expanded MPI, the first four pitch classes, F - D - E - C. (The pitch classes of the second measure, F - E - D - E - C, will also have an important role to play in this regard.) Both initial fragments fill in the interval of a perfect fourth F to C, and, on the largest scale, the opera moves from F major at the start to C major at the close. Thus the plagal nature of the overall structure, the essential thrust of the harmonic plan of this religious work, could symbolize a grand "Amen".

One might stop here, using just the final point of arrival of this one-act opera as a guide. But it is possible to explore further: Puccini's motivic work here has achieved a greater subtlety than we have seen above.³³

At the outset of our exploratory journey, a brief section of *Suor Angelica* was presented in Example 1 that seemed to make no functional harmonic sense because it traversed the chords C# minor, E major, C major, F# half-diminished and E minor seemingly without harmonic logic. If we take another look at these chords, however, we can see that each

³² For further examples, see 8/1, 15/1, 17/0 (the 'death' motive) and 50/3.

³³ For example, the third measure of this prelude begins a major third higher, on A: already we can note the juxtaposition of pitch classes F and A, a reference to the conflict between F major and A minor that is essential to the opera's construction. The harmonic conflict between F major and A minor in this opera (which can be reduced to a semitonal 5-6 motion from E to F, over A and C) is also reflected in the foreground use of the interval classes minor second and minor ninth. (The two other operas of *Il Trittico* also share this prominent use of the ninth: *Il Tabarro* opens with a G - A major ninth, and *Gianni Schicchi* begins with an F - G-major ninth.) Even the central aria »Senza mamma«, although it was added and revised in late in the game, moves from A minor to F major back to A minor. This harmonic conflict can be emblemized, as in the tonal turf war of *Manon Lescaut*, as a 6-5 struggle between pitch classes F and E, and, as the curtain rises, we hear all the adversarial parties: the first chordal sonority is E - (F) - A - C - F (at 0/4), first of a series of parallel seventh chords. A few bars later, the off-stage choir emphasizes the E - F connection again, this time melodically (1/2).

vertical harmony contains the pitch class E. So, like an 'internal' pedal point, E is being prolonged throughout this scene, even though the harmonies seem randomly dispersed, or dragged off-course in association with the dramatic import of the text and action.

Ex. 15 - *Suor Angelica*, prolongation of E at 52/0 - 53/0.

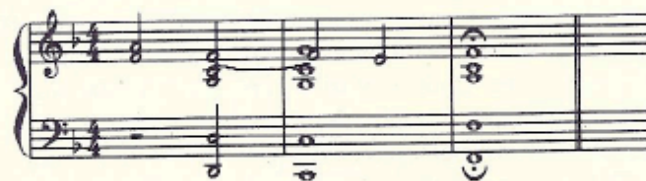
In many of his operas - but nowhere as clearly as in *Suor Angelica* - Puccini uses extended pitch classes, such as this E, to cut through the jungle of foreground harmonies; they appear as either tonicized notes, consonant common tones connecting harmonies, or dissonant pedal points. When a map is made of these long notes, what is revealed is an expanded opening motive, the MPI. Sometimes, these pitch classes can be interrupted by an expressive 'interpolation' (such as a solo aria) but they resume immediately afterwards. So, in order to trace the expansion of the MPI over larger spans of this opera, we must recognize this more sophisticated technique, and not look merely at harmonic arrival points, although, as tonicized pitch classes, those cadences will play a part as well. Space limitations prohibit a detailed exegesis of this process in *Suor Angelica*, but that can be found elsewhere.³⁴ For now, let it suffice to sketch an outline of the expanded MPI.

Ex. 16 - *Suor Angelica*, expansion of F-D-E-C.

³⁴ See BURTON, *op. cit.*, Chapter VI.

One can note that three of the pitch classes that constitute the MPI are crowned by full cadences: F at 3/2, D at 10/4 and C at 66/0.³⁵

Ex. 17a - *Suor Angelica*, F major cadence at 3/0-2.



Ex. 17b - *Suor Angelica*, D major cadence, 10/2-4.



Ex. 17c - *Suor Angelica*, C major cadence, 65/9-66/0.

³⁵ Greenwald writes: «...because there are few points of arrival in *Suor Angelica*, the event of closure at the end of "Senza mamma" is a dramatic landmark...»; cfr. GREENWALD, *Verdi's Patriarch and Puccini's Matriarch: Through the Looking-Glass and What Puccini Found There*, «19th-Century Music», LVII/3, Spring 1994, p. 231. Greenwald overlooks several very clear cadential arrival points, including the perfect authentic cadence in C major (the tonic!) at 65/8-66/0, which is omitted from her graph of the opera, on page 232 of the same article.

The prolonged E is harder to trace, as it cuts through various harmonies. E initially receives consonant support from A minor (39/0) A major (41/0) the strange key of C# minor (42/0), symbolic of the dark heart of this opera; this key is approached from an expanded augmented triad F - A - C# at 36/1-42/0.³⁶ This expansion begins with a theme in F major that will later be used for what Puccini termed «the royal march of the Madonna»;³⁷ the miraculous apparition of the Virgin Mary that concludes the opera. Here, though, the theme heralds the approach of a much more threatening personage: Angelica's Princess Aunt who bears the tragic news of the death of Angelica's son. The aunt, appearing at dusk dressed in black and offering her niece only cold cruelty, presents the greatest contrast with the loving, light-filled aspect of the Virgin Mary. The confrontation of Angelica and her aunt, in C# minor, is the dramatic dividing point of the drama.

It is E, prolonged through the C# minor and the A minor that follow, that continues the expansion of the MPI. After the arresting juxtaposition of C# minor and C minor that opens this section, E first appears as a pedal point at 43/10 - 44/0,³⁸ after which it remains active through assorted harmonies.³⁹ At 46/0, E minor once again takes over and the E pedal point returns at 46/9-11.⁴⁰ Pitch class E continues through this C# minor section to appear, from 52/2, as a consonant member of E major, C major and E minor, and finally A minor, at 53/2. When the Princess tells Angelica that her son has died, at 56/0, a whole-tone section with ostinato C - Bb - E commences, with E as the (emphasized) lowest pitch. The dramatic confrontation is now over, but E remains: through a C# minor seventh at 57/0, E major four bars later and finally, in a repetition

³⁶ We begin at 36/1 in solid F major, but at 39/0, A minor takes hold and, although there remain passing references in the bass line to F major, A minor is reasserted at 40/0. Now pitch class E is supported, which is also consonant with a change of mode to A major at 41/0, illustrating Suor Angelica's calmer, prayerful attitude. This prolongation of A is punctuated by an "Amen" at 41/5; significantly, the vocal line here rests on pitch class E. At 42/0, C# minor and the grim mood begin. The expanded augmented triad is completed and pitch class E is now being prolonged. Puccini utilizes expanded augmented triads (equal divisions of the octave) elsewhere in the work as well: from 4/0 - 6/8 (D-Bb-Gb), and from 31/0 - 32/9 (D-Bb-Gb).

³⁷ P. PANICHELLI, *Il "pretino" di Giacomo Puccini racconta*, 3rd ed., Pisa, Nistri Lischi, 1949, p. 177.

³⁸ Above this E, Puccini restates the F - E motive, harmonized by D minor and the C - E - G# augmented triad, followed by inversions of Bb major.

³⁹ The augmented triad C - E - G# at 44/6-10, C# minor from 45/0, and E minor at 45/10.

⁴⁰ At this point, C# becomes re-interpreted as Db to form the dominant of a Gb major interpolation, from 47/0: this happier major mode illustrates the joyful reaction of Angelica to news of her sister's engagement. But, as the dramatic tension rises, the foreground harmony rises as well, from Gb, through G at 48/0, to Ab at 49/8, which (at 50/0) becomes G#, the dominant that returns us to gloomy C# minor.

of the music opening this scene, an E pedal point, first under B \flat major and then, at 58/5, unadorned alone.

At this point in the opera, the singing subsides: wordlessly, the Princess Aunt prays, Angelica sobs and signs the document her aunt brought her. As the Princess leaves, night is falling. Truly the darkest emotional moment of the work, Puccini considered this stretch of un-sung music, which he referred to as an «intermezzo», as a dramatic dividing line:

[...] tutto quello che segue dopo l'intermezzo sia meno palese e come involto in un'atmosfera quasi irreale [...]⁴¹

[...everything that follows the intermezzo should be less obvious and as if shrouded in a quasi-unreal atmosphere ...]

Harmonically, the intermezzo is in A minor with a chromatic melodic line, and it segues easily into Angelica's A minor-F major-A minor aria "Senza mamma", which begins the next dramatic segment, "La grazia" ["The grace"]. Pitch class E is ultimately prolonged here.⁴²

The final member of our expanded opening motive, C is fully established with a cadence in C major at 66/0. A curious event is this cadence: it seems like a final resolution. Puccini writes a perfect authentic cadence to the tonic, set to an "Amen" and followed by a «pausa lunga»: the sense of completion is strong, yet still to come are Angelica's suicide and the miracle. This moment is not even the conclusion of one of the dramatic segments. In fact, this music will indeed be repeated at the end of the work, but with one important change: there will be no true dominant. The harmony in the final measures moves directly from a cadential 6/4 at 84/0-5 to the same C major/B \flat dominant seventh combination we saw above (which then resolves to C major). True, the B \flat dominant seventh contains D and F, which could suggest a dominant (G) feeling, but one cannot but agree that the actual dominant has been omitted the sec-

⁴¹ Undated letter from Puccini and Forzano to Antonio Rovascalli, the stage designer. Quoted in E. RESCIGNO, Theater program, Teatro alla Scala, Milan, 1982-3, p. 80.

⁴² Just as Puccini thought the stage picture should be less 'obvious' at this point, so is the harmony: the rising sequential theme that commences at 64/0 is ambiguous both tonally and in regard to its seven-bar phrase lengths. The theme begins in F major, but the occasional presence of an F \sharp sharp in the subsequent harmonies seems to suggest either E minor or G major. However, E minor appears to hold sway when, at 65/0, that harmony is extended for three extra bars and capped with a fermata. Although the theme does continue beyond this point, the emphasis on E minor reinforces the presence of our motivically-related and still-active pitch class E.

ond time around.⁴⁵ The G pedal point also lies under two chords forming a double neighbor pattern: A minor and F major. The presence here of these two harmonies, so vital to the structure of the piece, especially in the capacity of a double neighbor function, is hardly coincidental.

Ex. 18 - *Suor Angelica*, 84/4 - end.

The musical score for Ex. 18 shows the final measures of *Suor Angelica*. It is in 84/4 time. The bass line features a constant G pedal point. The right hand has a melodic line with a double neighbor pattern. Annotations include 'A minor', 'F major', '<DN>', 'ppp', and 'lamentoso'.

The overall construction of *Suor Angelica* is formed around two arpeggios of the triad F - A - C that support large-scale expansions of the opening motive. The first of these arpeggios is distorted by an initial move to C# minor, temporarily creating an expansion of the augmented triad F - A - C#, but which resolves to C at 66/0.

Ex. 19 - *Suor Angelica*, diagram of opera with arpeggios.

The musical score for Ex. 19 shows a diagram of opera with arpeggios. It is in 84/4 time. The bass line features a constant G pedal point. The right hand has a melodic line with a double neighbor pattern. Annotations include '6', 'F-D-E-C', '25', '42', '66', '66/2', '69', '75', 'F-E-D-E-C', '82', and '84'.

The appearance of the C# minor section occurs at the moment of greatest dramatic conflict, the confrontation between Suor Angelica and her Princess Aunt. At this moment, the psychological 'dissonance' of the dra-

⁴⁵ The argument that the final cadence is 'modal in its lack of a leading tone (B \flat , not B), and thus illustrative of the church-like setting, does not hold, since the first cadence at 66/0 was preceded by a true dominant.

matic situation is illustrated by the dissonance of the C#, which has taken the place of C and thus warped the major triad into an augmented one. Puccini has shown this C# - C struggle quite clearly on the foreground level as well, as seen in Example 1 and in Example 20 below.

Ex. 20 - *Suor Angelica*, C minor and C# minor, 45/0-4.

The scene between Angelica and her aunt comes exactly at the temporal mid-point of the opera. It also marks the end of the dramatic exposition and the first of two 'arrivals' at the convent, as we have seen, one shadowy and cruel, the other luminous and loving. Therefore, it would be tempting to link this dramatic bifurcation point with a musical one.⁴⁴ But, although Puccini's musical scheme is indeed bipartite, this moment does not mark the end of the first half of the deep structure: that does not occur until the resolution of the C# to C, at 66/0, and the first expanded MPI is complete.

* * *

This exploratory journey has reached its end for now. Although every twist and turn in the path to understanding Puccini's operas has not been discovered, we have seen how some consistent compositional techniques are traceable in a representative sample of his works. The opening motive, the MPI, is the source of musical coherence in both the microcosmic and macrocosmic realms. Thus, as we theorists make headway into the more remote regions of Puccini's repertoire, we should have confidence in finding not an unruly tonal wilderness, but an orderly landscape, full of bright promise.

⁴⁴ Greenwald chooses this option. GREENWALD, *Verdi's Patriarch and Puccini's Matriarch*, p. 232. However, in her discussion of «texture and macrostructure», she divides the opera into three parts. GREENWALD, *Dramatic Exposition and Musical Structure in Puccini's Operas*, pp. 116-118 and 193.