

## Recondite Harmony: the Operas of Puccini

### Chapter 11: *La Rondine*: masquerades and simulacra

Can you guess which opera was written for a Viennese theater, contains waltzes, polkas and other dance tunes, has four-square phrases and catchy melodies? It involves two sets of lovers (one of which is an older, more experienced woman who ultimately separates from a younger man)? Moreover, no one dies and the older woman, who sings a song about the unfulfilled love of a woman long ago, has a maid who tries for a singing career and borrows her mistress's clothes to go out at night. A work by Johann Strauss, Franz Lehár, or Richard Strauss might spring to mind, but the work's true identity is, of course, Puccini's *La Rondine* (*The Swallow*).

After *La fanciulla del West* was launched, Puccini searched for a new subject without much success. Then, in October 1913, he was at the Karlteater in Vienna to supervise the Austrian premiere of *Fanciulla*, when he was approached by Siegmund Eibenschütz and Emil Berte;<sup>1</sup> they wanted to commission an operetta from him and offered a substantial sum of money.<sup>2</sup> After he received the libretto, however, he immediately rejected it as being “the usual slovenly and banal operetta [...] with parties and occasions to dance, without character study, without originality and finally without interest (the most serious thing).”<sup>3</sup> He apparently found those missing qualities in a second proffered libretto, written by Alfred

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<sup>1</sup> In the Puccini literature one can still find Emil Berté (1855-1922) erroneously identified as Heinrich Berté, who was his younger brother and achieved some renown with *Das Dreimäderlhaus*, an operetta based on Schubert's works. It is probable that Puccini was introduced to these men by Franz Lehár. Otto Schneiderei, *Franz Lehár: Eine Biographie in Zitaten* (Innsbruck: Pinguin-Verlag, 1984): 180.

<sup>2</sup> News of Puccini writing an operetta moved fast and on 21 March 1914 *Musical America* reported that Puccini had written an operetta for Andreas Dippel [the former Metropolitan Opera manager], who had suggested the theme to the maestro and who would be presenting the first performance. In a report dated 4 July 1914, *The New York Times* printed a similar notice. Dippel had announced a season of combined operetta and light opera on Broadway and, in an earlier article in the *Times*, on 6 April 1914, it was reported that “show girls’ are to be put through a routine of dancing and fencing lessons to make them more graceful and distinguished in stage presence.” See Michael Kaye, *The Unknown Puccini*, 175.

<sup>3</sup> [E’ la solita operetta sciatta [slovenly] e banale...col solito oriente e...occidente in contrasto: feste da ballo e occasioni di danza, senza studio di carattere, senza originalita’ e infine senza interesse (cosa piu’ grave).] 14 December 1913. Eugenio Gara. ed. *Carteggi Pucciniani*. (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), 417.

Willner<sup>4</sup> and Heinz Reichert,<sup>5</sup> which was sent to him in March 1914, and then reworked by Giuseppe Adami.<sup>6</sup>

*La Rondine* was destined to be an opera, not an operetta,<sup>7</sup> yet in many ways, it still retains hallmarks of opera's more convivial cousin, as we shall see below. So, how are we to understand this work? Is it a comment on or parody of the operetta tradition, an attempt to demonstrate compositional versatility to his rivals,<sup>8</sup> or some new synthetic genre? Perhaps we can peek behind the disguise and see.

### *masquerades*

There is little doubt that *La Rondine* owes much to *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911): we have explicit evidence that Strauss's work was on Puccini's mind during the period in which he

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Willner was a highly successful writer of operetta librettos. Some of his works include: *Die schöne Saska* (operetta with Reichert), for O. Nedbal, 1917; *Wo die Lerche singt* (operetta with Reichert) for Lehár, 1918; *Frasquita* (operetta with Reichert) for Lehár, 1922; *Ade, du liebes Elternhaus* [Die Lori] (Singspiel, with Reichert) for O. Jascha, 1928; *Rosen aus Florida* (operetta with Reichert), Korngold, after Fall, 1929; *Walzer aus Wien* (Singspiel, with Reichert and E. Marischka) for J. Bittner and Korngold, after J. Strauss and J. Strauss (the elder), 1930.

<sup>5</sup> Heinz Reichert (1877-1940) was an operetta librettist who collaborated with Grünbaum, Willner, and Lehár.

<sup>6</sup> Giuseppe Adami (1879-1946) collaborated with Puccini on *La Rondine*, *Il Trittico* and *Turandot*, as well as writing... A third collaborator named Dario Niccodemi, whom Puccini also contacted about help with *Il Tabarro*, secretly intervened for the versification. Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), a translated and slightly revised edition of *Giacomo Puccini: L'arte internazionale di un musicista italiano* (Venice: Marsilio, 1995), 336.

<sup>7</sup> *La Rondine* did not have its premiere not in Vienna as planned but, because of the disruptions of World War I, in which Italy and Austria were on opposite sides, it first took the stage in the neutral Montecarlo, on 27 March 1917. This first version is what is normally produced today, although two other versions followed: these involved a rewriting of the last act, with mostly textual and dramatic modifications. The dates of these are: version 1) 1917, the current version; version 2) 1920, in German and Italian versions; version 3) 1921-22. For further detail on the revisions, see Alfredo Mandelli, "Tre 'Rondini'. Un enigma e un Esperimento. Ovvero i 'casi' de La Rondine (con un 'caso' in piu)" in (Bologna: Teatro Comunale, 1986-87), program book: 12-56, and Girardi, *Puccini*, 353ff.

<sup>8</sup> Puccini was quite aware of his competition. In a letter to Luigi Illica on 24 January 1913, he writes: "Strauss (as others did) found a first subject and drowned himself in others believing that the fame acquired with the first would be a beautiful and good absolution for the successive...sins. Debussy? *Pelléas* and silence. I could speak of many others, of our own, but for these at the moment there is no resurrection to exalt." [Strauss (fu come altri) trovò un primo soggetto e si affogò in altri credendo che la fama acquistata col primo fosse un'assoluzione bella e buone per i successivi...peccati. Debussy? *Pelléas* e silenzio. Potrei parlare di molto altri, dei nostri, ma per questi al momento non vi è resurrezione da esaltare.] Gara, *Carteggi*, 408. It is not clear to which opera Puccini refers as Strauss's "first": this letter was written after the emergence of *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), which was a huge success for Strauss, but which was certainly not his first operatic work, and, by 1913, Strauss had only subsequently written *Ariadne auf Naxos*; so perhaps Puccini is alluding to *Salome*.

composed the opera. As he wrote to Angelo Eisner,<sup>9</sup> on 14 December 1913, “I shall never compose operetta: comic opera, yes, like *Rosenkavalier*, but more entertaining and more organic.”<sup>10</sup> This statement is usually interpreted to mean that Puccini wanted to compose a work that was more entertaining and organic than operetta, which does make sense: a through-composed opera would be more “organic” than an operetta in which closed numbers alternate with spoken dialogue. However, it is equally possible that Puccini’s statement refers to *Der Rosenkavalier*, an opera about which he expressed a somewhat dubious opinion, and whose composer he perhaps thought he might outdo. Witness this letter to Antonio Bettolacci (undated but probably written on 2 March 1911, just after the disastrous Italian premiere of the Strauss work at La Scala in Milan<sup>11</sup>): “Dear Tonino, With a deeply moved spirit I share with you the death of *Rosenkavalier* last night at La Scala [...] Only one page is beautiful – the presentation of the rose”<sup>12</sup> As we shall see below, Puccini took this “page” to heart: the polytonality that Strauss employs in the presentation scene (and in its thematic recalls) will find resonances in *La Rondine*.

*Der Rosenkavalier*, coming after the stridently dissonant *Salome* and *Elektra* in Strauss’s corpus of works, is usually seen as an about-face, a rejection of modernism, although not

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<sup>9</sup> Angelo Eisner Eisenhof, patron of Italian opera and Puccini’s friend, who helped negotiate the contract for *La Rondine* with the Austrians. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 156. See also Eduardo Rescigno, “La rondine nelle lettere a Angelo Eisner” in *La Rondine* (Venice: Teatro La Fenice, 1983), program book.

<sup>10</sup> [Io, operetta non la farò mai: opera comica sì: vedi *Rosenkavalier*, ma piu’ divertente e piu’ organica.] Gara, *Carteggi*, 417.

<sup>11</sup> Some sources indicate that the Milanese audience reacted negatively to the Italian names given in *Rosenkavalier* to the pair of intriguers, Valzacchi e Annina; other aver that the anachronistic use of waltzes was even more shocking. See Alfredo Mandelli, “Puccini e il ‘caso Rondine’” in (Milan: Teatro alla Scala, 1968-70), program book, 73.

<sup>12</sup> [Caro Tonino, con animo commosso ti partecipo la morte del *Cavaliere delle rose* iersera alla scala [...] Una pagina sola è bella - la presentazione della rosa.] Howard Gotlieb Archive, Boston University. Antonio Bettolacci, was the household administrator for the nearby Ginori-Lisci family (*La bobeme* was dedicated to the Marchese Ginori), as well as Puccini’s hunting companion and good friend. [See *Quaderni Pucciniani*, (1996): 227.]

universally.<sup>13</sup> Puccini voiced a similar sentiment about his own opera in a letter to Sybil Seligman in September 1914: “[*La Rondine*] is a light, sentimental opera with touches of comedy [...] It’s a sort of reaction against the repulsive music of today.”<sup>14</sup> A third-hand report of Puccini’s attitude seems to second this: it comes from Adami who relates to the composer how publisher Tito Ricordi thought this new, seemingly reactionary work should be presented to the public:<sup>15</sup> “Eliminate as much as possible the idea that it is a lyric opera, but a care-free musical comedy with a quasi-display of simplicity and with a spirit of reaction against modernism and ultra-modernism [...] This was always also your idea.”<sup>16</sup>

A “quasi-display of simplicity”? If one can trust that this was also Puccini’s conception, as Adami states, then the music of *La Rondine* perhaps should be seen to reflect a critical disjunct between its lighter dramatic content and the musical language in which the tale is told. Like Strauss anachronistically heaping polytonality, atonality and late-Romantic chromaticism upon his Mozartian story,<sup>17</sup> so does Puccini put forth events from the French

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Leon Botstein who writes: “Within this paradigm [of Modernism rendering Romanticism obsolete] Strauss’s work after *Elektra* represents a backward turn. [...] There is, however, a more convincing revisionist argument. *Der Rosenkavalier* was, as Strauss and Hofmannsthal consistently argued, a breakthrough. It was a model and the beginning of an innovative period, one filled with evident linkages to Strauss’s second period. There is a profound continuity between *Elektra* and *Der Rosenkavalier*. The use of extended tonal blocks and contrasts to delineate character and action, the line of experimentation regarding the setting of dialogue, the use of the orchestra with voice, the vocal ensemble writing, the structure of beginnings and endings, not to speak of specific thematic resemblances, can be identified.” Leon Botstein, “The Enigmas of Richard Strauss: A Revisionist View” in Bryan Gilliam, ed. *Richard Strauss and his World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992: 3-32.

<sup>14</sup> Vincent Seligman, *Puccini Among Friends* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 257-8.

<sup>15</sup> Ultimately Ricordi did not publish *La Rondine*, which went instead to another firm, the rival Sonzogno—the only Puccini opera to do so.

<sup>16</sup> [Togliere cioè’ quanto e’ possibile l’idea che si tratti di un’opera lirica, ma d’una commedia musicale scritta senza preoccupazioni con una ostentazione, quasi, di semplicita’ e con uno spirito di reazione al modernismo e all’ultra modernismo. [...] E’ sempre stata anche l’idea vostra.] Quoted in Alfredo Mandelli, “Tre ‘Rondini,” 25-26.

<sup>17</sup> The characters of *Der Rosenkavalier* are often compared with those of Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*: The Marschallin and the Countess, Octavian and Cherubino, Baron Ochs and the Count, etc. Indeed, Strauss himself stated that Mozart’s spirit was around him when he worked on this opera. Perhaps less obvious are comparisons with *Don Giovanni*, in which there also are exchanged clothes, a lustful older man, and humorous “commentary” from the composer (this would include, for example, the knowing winks to the audience about music borrowed from other operas including Mozart’s own “Non piu’ andrai” from *Figaro*, which Leporello disparages).

Second Empire era<sup>18</sup> through the musical camouflage of early twentieth-century popular syncopated dance tunes, polytonal gestures, tone clusters and more.<sup>19</sup>

Superficially, the two plots seem to both revolve around similar female protagonists: Strauss's Marschallin is an older woman nostalgic for youthful amorous adventures, and she ultimately ends the relationship she is in, as does Puccini's Magda. However, the narrative paths that these two women trace are essentially different. Magda actually does get another chance at love and succeeds in finding a way to repeat the past. And when she goes in search of adventure, she disguises herself as a simple grisette<sup>20</sup> named Paulette (perhaps another "quasi-display of simplicity"), but this disguise ultimately falls away: when Ruggero proposes marriage, a home with his family and even children, Magda owns up to her un-simple, non-innocent past, and breaks it off.<sup>21</sup>

The similarities of the two operas lie rather more in their compositional strategies, in which shifting musical styles reflect narrative voices independent from, or at least non-

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<sup>18</sup> The Second Empire lasted from 1852 to 1870, the period in which France was under the rule of Emperor Napoleon III.

<sup>19</sup> If an operatic score is a filter through which we perceive other elements of the work, then the densities of these particular filters are quite high. In this respect, however, there is a difference, not in kind, but only in degree between *La Rondine* and, say, *La Fanciulla del West*, in which a modernist European musical language--apart from the tunes borrowed for local color--is used to tell a folksy American story. The same can be said of the score of Strauss's *Salome*, which hardly recalls music Herod could have heard.

<sup>20</sup> A French working-class girl, especially a pretty or flirtatious one. Grisettes also appear in Lehár's *The Merry Widow*, which is also set in Paris.

<sup>21</sup> In the third version of *La Rondine*, it is Ruggero who ends the relationship. Nevertheless, several writers have noted the similarities in plot with Verdi's *La traviata*, in which the heroine Violetta, a courtesan, sacrifices her love for the sake of her lover's family's moral values. Paduano writes: "The repression in *La Rondine* is more complete because it brings to extreme consequences the paradox that constitutes the true and qualifying contact with *La Traviata*: it is the person excluded from social norms who, more than any other, respects and exalts those norms, remaining trapped in the vicious circle, so that to confirm her own marginization is the only way to conquer it." [il messaggio comune alla *Rondine* e alla *Traviata* – il conflitto tra l'eros e la morale borghese – e' espresso dall'opera pucciniana con radicalita' maggiore...lperche' porta a conseguenze estreme il paradosso che costituisce il vero e qualificante contatto con *La Traviata*: quello per cui e' la persona esclusa dalle norme sociali quella che piu' di ogni altra rispetta ed esalta le norme stesse, restando intrappolata nel circolo vizioso per cui ribadire la propria emarginazione e' il solo modo di superarla] Guido Paduano, "Doretta e le altre" in *La Rondine* (Milan: Teatro alla Scala, 1994), program book, 78. Puccini does seem to show a concern for societal propriety that his previous works, such as *La bohème*, ignored. A letter to Sybil Seligman 23 December 1911 reads: "I want to express moral sufferings without blood or strong drama." Vincent Seligman, *Puccini Among Friends* (New York: Macmillan, 1938): 212.

congruent with, the dramatic material. In regard to Strauss's technique, Julius Korngold writes, "The Marschallin and her Cherub are suddenly breakfasting in Mozartian style; Frau Maria Theresa suddenly becomes pensive in the style of Lortzing; Octavian and Sophie finally fall into each other's arms in the naive, folk song-like style à la "Sah' ein Knab' ein Röslein steh'n." And a flood of waltzes announces the pact that has been concluded with the operetta."<sup>22</sup> Puccini's styles are just as slippery, passing quickly from waltz to tango to dissonant clusters to Tristan-esque harmonies.

The scores of *Rosenkavalier* and *Rondine*, are both conflation of tonal and non-tonal elements. And in each work, diatonic constructions appear but sometimes utilized in such non-traditional manners that any sense of standard tonal functioning is weakened, if not completely submerged. The use of diatonic chords, juxtaposed and layered in polytonal gestures, seems an ironic modernist weapon.<sup>23</sup>

An example of this is the "Rose" theme in *Rosenkavalier*: at II/25, after establishing F# major, Strauss places major chords on G and F, the roots of each a half-step away from the F# "tonic." In essence, Strauss here is utilizing neighbor chords (borrowed from other tonalities), rather than more standard single neighbor notes. He then subverts the G major into G minor and jumps to Eb major as well. [Ex. 11.0] At the opening of Act II of *Rondine*, Puccini also opts for major neighbor chords (this time, at the distance of a whole-step): in

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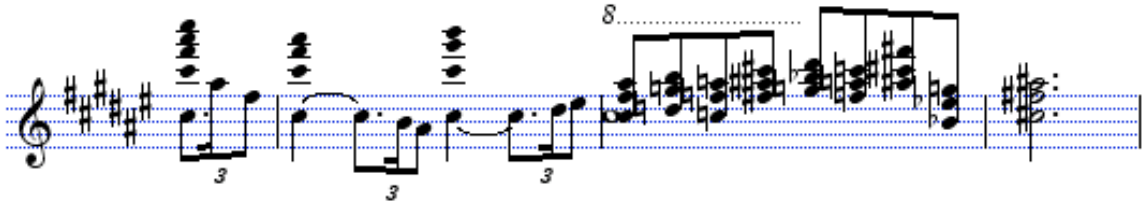
<sup>22</sup> Julius Korngold, "Der Rosenkavalier: Comedy for Music by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Music by Richard Strauss" *Neue Freie Presse* (9 April 1911), Vienna. Reprinted in translation in Bryan Gilliam, ed. *Richard Strauss and his World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992: 355. The earliest use of the waltz in opera is generally credited to *Una cosa rara* by Martín y Soler (1786) [*Grove Music Online*, s.v. "waltz," accessed 5 August 2011.] However, there have been many operatic waltzes since: as a recurring melody in *Don Pasquale*, in the Act I finale of *Faust*, the opening of Act II of *Eugene Onegin*, in Act I of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*. Of course Puccini's most famous waltz is not danced at all: Musetta's waltz from *La bohème*, which plays up the seductive reputation of the genre. Another steamy, if out-of-tune, waltz will appear in *Il tabarro*. See Cori Ellison, "Do I hear a waltz?" Metropolitan Opera International, online at: <http://www.operainfo.org>, Accessed 7 August 2011.

<sup>23</sup> In *Salome*, a somewhat related ironic use of diatonicism occurs: as Salome lovingly admires John the Baptist's decapitated head (arguably the most horrific moment in opera), the score shows a perfect authentic cadence to a bright C# major at "du warst schön" (rehearsal #332/6).

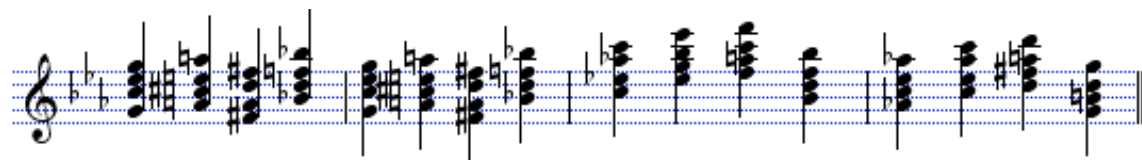
the key of C minor we hear D major (with its dominant A major), and Bb major [Ex. 11.0b], which becomes the basis for variations at the start of this act.

Example 11.0

a) Richard Strauss, *Der Rosenkavalier*, “presentation scene”

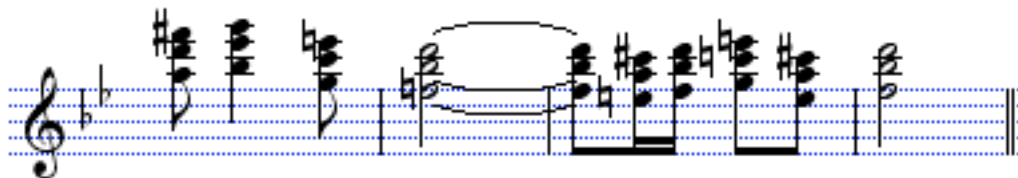


b) *La Rondine*, opening of Act II



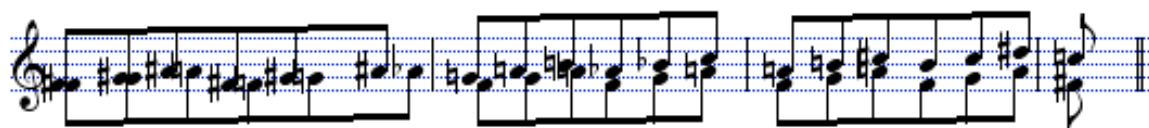
A related procedure occurs at I/6/9, where Puccini writes a sequence of the following major chords: Bb, E, Eb, C#, D, Eb. And there are other sorts of polytonal moments in *La Rondine* as well: at II/1/7, an interjection of B major follows a phrase in Bb; at II/31/4, open fifths on F, G, C, and Eb hover over a sustained D pedal; and at III/19/4, we hear diatonically related Eb and Bb major chords glossed with neighbor harmonies of D and C majors. [Ex. 11.1]

Example. 11.1: polytonality in *La Rondine* at III/19/4



What has been noted elsewhere<sup>24</sup> as a bitonal overlay at the minor second is the entrance of the maid Lisette<sup>25</sup> at I/18/0. A closer reading will show, however, that the ostinato pattern of the lower voice in F major becomes superimposed with its own pattern displaced in a continually rising pattern F# major - G major - Ab major - A major - B major. [Ex. 11.2] At this point, the distance of a tritone between the voices is reached (F-B) and the whole complex moves upwards together, so that we then hear the following simultaneous tritone-related pairs of major keys: F# + C, G + Db, and Ab + D, leading ultimately to Eb major.

Example 11.2: entrance of Lisette, I/18/0



Alongside these dissonant moments in *Rondine* is also the cognitively jarring use of music from another time and place, such as the fox-trots<sup>26</sup> and tango. (The Italian tenor's aria in *Rosenkavalier* plays a similar role.) Puccini also employs anachronistic closed forms and almost classical recitatives in this opera.<sup>27</sup> One means of framing the anachronistic use of music in these works is through the concept of “music squared,” from the Italian “musica al quadrato” (that is, “music x music” or “musica per se stessa”—a pun indicating “music for its own sake.”) The term denotes the sincretical use of pre-existing material in a way that marks it for special attention. Puccini's anachronistic dances and older musical styles follow

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Alfredo Mandelli, “Puccini e il ‘caso Rondine,’” 79-80. Girardi, taking a slightly different tack, writes that the passage of *martellate* minor seconds “does not aim at bitonality, but at livening up the atmosphere, preparing for the second, intense lyric section.” Girardi, *Puccini*, 343.

<sup>25</sup> Lisette and Prunier, along with Magda and Ruggero, make up the two sets of lovers that are staples of the operetta stage, but which also can be found in Mozart operas, as Girardi has pointed out: “a double pair of lovers, one upper class, one lower class”, like *Die Entführung*, *Nozze*, *Così*, *Zauberflöte*.” Girardi, *Puccini*, 340.

<sup>26</sup> Puccini probably would not have been happy with (and might have sued) Paul Whiteman for his 1921 arrangement of music from *Madama Butterfly* as a fox-trot, entitled “Cho-Cho-San.” It can be heard online at: <http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/7907>.

<sup>27</sup> For example, an old-fashioned recitative is heard at III/32/0 and “Bevo al tuo fresco sorriso,” not far from a traditional drinking song, ends with a clear cadence just before II/38/0.

suit, and by choosing to use them he affirms a twentieth-century sensibility that would not be alien to a Stravinsky or a Weill.<sup>28</sup>

This temporal incongruity can indeed be seen as modernistic commentary, but it is also in dialogue with the theme of memory and reliving past events that pervades the work. *La Rondine* begins at sunset, a time of day redolent of endings and beginnings. Soon Magda completes Prunier's song "Ch'il bel sogno di Doretta," which engages with the theme of time and memory in many ways:<sup>29</sup> Magda sings of Doretta, whose capacity to love is re-ignited, as Magda's own shall be.<sup>30</sup> Because Magda sings this at the start of the opera, she is also predicting her own future.<sup>31</sup> But finally, like the swallow of the title, she returns to her nest, forsaking this new/old love. Given the intertwining here of past, present and future (which is also Magda's past), the musical anachronisms could be read as more apt than ironic.

As Alfredo Mandelli writes, "those twentieth-century dance materials inserted in the opera give it a curious, vaguely winking sense."<sup>32</sup> Puccini's "winking" suggests not only narratological commentary, but also a comedic distance that shows up in many other guises

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<sup>28</sup> D'Amico writes that "the crisis of *Fanciulla del West* brought Puccini to strongly reduce his faith in direct expression of emotions, moving from naturalism to his type of decadentism, and thus from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries." [La crisi della *Fanciulla del West* porto' Puccini a ridurre fortemente la sua fiducia nell'espressione diretta degli affetti, facendolo passare dal naturalismo a un suo decadentismo, e insomma dall'Otto al Novecento.] Fedele D'Amico, "Un'opera sopra un'operetta" in *La Rondine* (Venice: Teatro la Fenice, 1872-73), program book, 274. Even so, Puccini did not shy away from either direct expression of emotion or naturalism in *Il Tabarro* and *Suor Angelica*, works that were still to come.

<sup>29</sup> Greenwald writes, this aria "enjoys the unique status of being narrative, autobiographical by projection, and a song." Helen Greenwald. "Dramatic Exposition and Musical Structure in Puccini's Operas" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1991), 133.

<sup>30</sup> This piece is written in  $\frac{3}{4}$ , seemingly at one with the many waltzes in the opera. However, the sounded meter is  $\frac{2}{4}$  if one counts the pickup as downbeat. Since there are three of these hidden  $\frac{2}{4}$  "measures" in each phrase, written as two displaced measures of  $\frac{3}{4}$ , this passage could be considered a type of hemiola. When the theme is recalled at I/55/11, the rhythmic values are altered to reflect the notated  $\frac{3}{4}$  meter.

<sup>31</sup> A similar point is made in Paduano, "Doretta e le altre," 85.

<sup>32</sup> [Quei materiali ballabili novecenteschi che, inseriti in un'opera, le danno un curioso senso vagamente ammiccante.] Alfredo Mandelli, "Il 'caso-Rondine'" in (Treviso: Teatro Comunale, 1974), program book, 30.

throughout this work.<sup>33</sup> The most obvious musical jokes are the quotes from Strauss's *Salome* at I/35/10, immediately following Prunier's<sup>34</sup> description of his ideal women: Galatea, Berenice, and Salome (repeated at II/34/8 at the second reference to the Prinzessin), and the *Marseillaise* at I/43, when Paris is mentioned. But also quite humorous are his instrumental renderings of Lisette's memories of the whistles (that is, boos) and the laughter that greeted her debut as a performer, at III/21/8 (repeated at II/23/9) and III/26, respectively.<sup>35</sup>

The comic mask is only one of the musical habiliments Puccini borrows from Viennese operetta. The traditions of Italian opera and Viennese operetta are not, however, as disjunct as one might believe, both having inherited much from the Commedia dell'Arte. But, beyond this, operetta had been very much *alla moda* in Italy in the 1880's. The prominent inclusion of dances—the *sine qua non* of Viennese operetta<sup>36</sup>—derived in part from the French grand opera tradition (“opera ballo” in Italian), and was much in evidence in the Italian operas of that time.<sup>37</sup> Puccini's first opera, *Le Villi*, was an *opera ballo*, and dance is a component of almost all his subsequent operas.<sup>38</sup> His contemporaries wrote operettas as well, especially Leoncavallo,<sup>39</sup> but Puccini never did. In a letter to Eisner of 25 March 1914,

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<sup>33</sup> In a letter to Sybil Seligman of 19 November 1911, when he was still searching for a subject, Puccini wrote: “I have a desire to laugh and to make other people laugh,”<sup>33</sup> and so he does in this opera. Seligman, *Puccini among friends*, 212.

<sup>34</sup> Girardi contends that Prunier is a satirical version of Gabrielle D'Annunzio, the Italian Decadent poet with whom tried to collaborate several times. Girardi, *Puccini*, 342.

<sup>35</sup> Although there is humor in his previous operas, a full-fledged comedy will not appear until *Gianni Schicchi* in 1918.

<sup>36</sup> Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, for example, has waltzes, polkas and marches; Lehár's *The Merry Widow* has marches, a mazurka, a polonaise as well as many waltzes.

<sup>37</sup> See Guido Salvetti, “Edgar di Puccini nella crisi degli anni ottanta,” *Quaderni Pucciniani*, 1992: 73: “In 1881 at La Scala the ballet *Excelsior* had garnered a noisy success [...] That success lasted the whole decade and quickly lent support to the fashion for Viennese operetta in Italy.” [Era successo, infatti, che nel 1881, alla Scala, uno strepitoso successo avesse accolto il ballo *Excelsior*— [...] Quel successo attraversò tutto il decennio e si affiancò ben presto alla moda dell'operetta viennese in Italia.]

<sup>38</sup> See Greenwald, *Dramatic Exposition*, 76-80.

<sup>39</sup> Ruggero Leoncavallo (1857-1919), composer of *Pagliacci*, also wrote the following operettas: *La reginetta delle rose* (1912), *La candidata* (1915), *Prestami tua moglie* (1916), *A chi la giarrettiera?* (1919), *Il primo bacio* (1923, posth.),

he exclaimed: “Let the enemies talk. Even here they say that I lowered myself to do operettas like Leoncavallo!! This never, and again never.”<sup>40</sup>

In operettas, as in *La Rondine*, catchy tunes, as well as dances, take center stage.<sup>41</sup> This does not sound at all like “standard” Puccini: up to this point, he had mostly been known for his musically fragmented scores that intimately reflect each nuance of the drama in what we would term a soundtrack-like manner.<sup>42</sup> In fact, one of Torre Franca’s complaints was that taking away the words from Puccinian scores would render the notes meaningless.<sup>43</sup> In *La Rondine*, however, Puccini seems to write music that can almost stand alone, upon which a text floats semi-detached. This impression is made even stronger when one notes that, in the revisions of *La rondine*, completely different words have been set to identical music. An extreme instance of this is a change in Act III from the first to second versions that keeps the same music for “M’hai rovinata” [You ruined me] as “Innamorata!” [My love!] In fact, one might say of this work: *prima la musica poi le parole*.<sup>44</sup>

But the invariance of this *musique accompli* in the presence of altered text is not just another example of compositional recycling, as some have suggested.<sup>45</sup> It is part and parcel, as Puccini may have noted, of the operetta tradition. One example from Johann Strauss’s *Die*

*La maschera nuda* (1925, posth). Mascagni wrote *Il re a Napoli* (1885), and *Si* (1919). *Grove Music Online*, accessed 6 August 2011, s.v. “Leoncavallo” and “Mascagni.”

<sup>40</sup> [Anche qui si dice che mi sono abbassato a far l’operetta come Leoncavallo!!! Questo mai e poi mai.] Gara, *Carteggi*, 422. In regard to this quote, D’Amico poses question of whether Puccini means he would never write operettas, or never write operettas *like Leoncavallo*. D’Amico, “Un’opera sopra un’operetta,” 268.

<sup>41</sup> Greenwald writes: “the dance is an emblem of the operetta genre in *La Rondine*” Greenwald, 32.

<sup>42</sup> Marcia Citron explores this idea in “The Operatics of Detachment: *Tosca* in the James Bond Film *Quantum of Solace*,” *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Spring 2011), 316-340. See also Deborah Burton, “Ariadne’s Threads: Puccini and Cinema” in *Studi Musicali*, forthcoming.

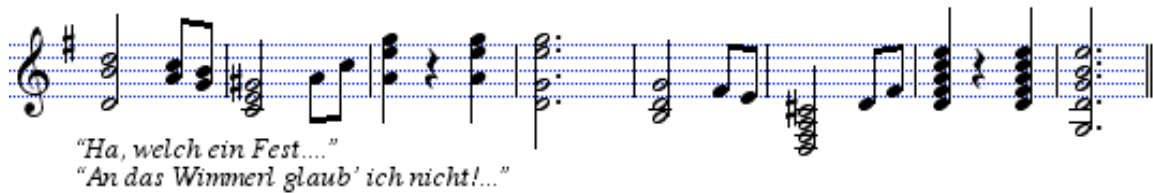
<sup>43</sup> See note 59 below. Discussed in Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 337.

<sup>44</sup> Budden finds this especially problematic: “the new text [does not] always sit easily on the old music.” Budden, *Puccini*, 367.

<sup>45</sup> See Budden on this subject, who compares this to Puccini’s re-use of the same music for his “Agnus Dei and the Madrigale in *Manon Lescaut*, the romanza “Malconia” that supplies part of the love duet in *Le Villi*, and the lullaby “Sogno d’or” which became “Bevo al tuo fresco sorriso” in *La Rondine*. Julian Budden, “Traversie di un’opera sentimentale” in *La Rondine* (Milan: Teatro alla Scala, 1994), program book: 55-56.

*Fledermaus*<sup>46</sup> occurs at the beginning of Act III, where the second theme of the famous waltz supports both the text “Ha, welch ein Fest, welche Nacht voll Freud!” [Ha, what a party, what a joyful night!] and “An das Wimmerl glaub’ ich nicht! Nein, das Wimmerl schreckt ihn nicht!” [I don’t believe in this pimple! No, he won’t be stopped by the pimple!] [Ex. 11.3]

Ex. 11.3: *Die Fledermaus*, Act III



Here, the *Fledermaus* characters are singing along with the onstage waltz, so perhaps the re-use of the melody might be understood as a quasi-diegetic gesture. But the interplay of diegetic and non-diegetic is also an integral (and clever) aspect of the genre. At the beginning of the same opera, Rosalinda (like Puccini’s Magda and the Marschallin, an older woman looking for love) complains about her beau Alfred: “Oh wenn er nur nicht singen wollte!” [Oh, if he only would stop singing!] In *Rosenkavalier*, Strauss and Hofmannsthal recalled this type of humor when, in Act III to the leitmotive known as “Luck of the Lerchenaus,” Octavian and Baron Ochs comment: “What lovely music!” “Die schöne Musik! Is mei Leiblied, weiss Sie das?” [It’s my favorite song, do you know it?]<sup>47</sup>

Puccini makes no such self-referential jokes in *La Rondine*<sup>48</sup> but does engage with the diegetic/nondiegetic issue by putting a piano onstage for Prunier to play in Act I, and an

<sup>46</sup> Budden has commented that Puccini’s Act II “Bevo al tuo fresco sorriso, as a concertato, unhurried drinking song, owes much to “Bruderlein und Schwesterlein” from *Fledermaus*. Budden, *Puccini*, 344-5. Both pieces are also developed into canons.

<sup>47</sup> As noted above, in *Don Giovanni*, Mozart also plays this game, having Leporello disparage a quote of the composer’s own “Non più andrai.” from *Figaro*.

<sup>48</sup> Puccini does do this, however, in *Il Tabarro*, a score he was writing simultaneously. At 25/9, the orchestra plays the opening theme of “Mi chiamano Mimi” from *La bohème*, while the minstrel says that it is the story of Mimi.

onstage waltz in Act II (at II/14/0). The setting for it is the Bal Bullier, a real dance hall, which was also known as the “Bal des Étudiants.”<sup>49</sup> [Ex. 11.4].

Example 11.4: photo of the Bal Bullier, 1908<sup>50</sup>



Most of the dance tunes that permeate the score of *La Rondine* are nondiegetic, however, which is not to say that they are unrelated to characterization or narrative elements.

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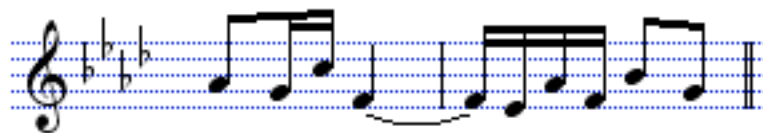
<sup>49</sup> A 1901 description of the Bal Bullier reads as follows: “You pass along with the line of waiting poets and artists, buy a green ticket for two francs at the little cubby-hole of a box-office, are divested of your stick by one of half a dozen white-capped matrons at the vestiaire, hand your ticket to an elderly gentleman in a silk hat and funereal clothes, at the top of the stairway sentineled by a guard of two soldiers, and the next instant you see the ball in full swing below you. [...] There is nothing disappointing about the ‘Bal Bullier.’ It is all you expected it to be, and more, too. Below you is a veritable whirlpool of girls and students - a vast sea of heads, and a dazzling display of colors and lights and animation. Little shrieks and screams fill your ears, as the orchestra crashes into the last page of a galop, quickening the pace until Yvonne’s little feet slip and her cheeks glow, and her eyes grow bright, and half her pretty golden hair gets smashed over her impudent little nose. Then the galop is brought up with a quick finish.” F. Berkeley Smith, *The Real Latin Quarter* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901), 58-60.

<sup>50</sup> From *Un Bal d’Etudiants (Bullier) : notice historique, accompagnée d’une photogravure...* (Paris: Librairie H. Champion, 1908). <http://www.bmlisieux.com/curiosa/bullier.htm>, Accessed 7 August 2011.

In addition to the many waltzes,<sup>51</sup> Prunier's theme is a tango, first heard at I/3/0 (with a touch of the blues, seven bars later), a polka appears at I/47/0 when dance halls are mentioned,<sup>52</sup> a one-step pops up at the mention of Ruggero's home town of Montauban (II/10/0), and so on.<sup>53</sup> [Ex. 11.5a-c]

Ex. 11.5: dance rhythms in *La Rondine*

a) tango I/3/0



b) polka, I/47/0



c) one-step, II/10/0



One operetta composer who had enormous influence on Puccini, however, was neither of the Strausses, but Franz Lehár, a close friend after their meeting in Vienna in 1913. Puccini kept an autographed photo of Lehár on his piano, and the Austro-Hungarian composer was in attendance at the posthumous première of *Turandot* in 1925 at La Scala.

<sup>51</sup> The majority of the waltzes are French-style, with a strong accent on the first beat, as opposed to Viennese with a Luftpause on the second beat. In sketches for *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini considered using a Boston waltz, with accents on all three beats; see “Gli abbozzi dell’Accademia Filarmonica di Bologna” in Arthur Groos, ed. *Madama Butterfly: fonti e documenti della genesi* (Lucca: Centro Studi Giacomo Puccini, 2005): 163.

<sup>52</sup> Polkas were very much part of the Viennese operetta, and ballroom, traditions. They were written by the Strausses, Josef Gungl, Hans Christian Lumbye and Emile Waldteufel. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>, s.v. “polka,” accessed 16 June 2011.

<sup>53</sup> See also Alfredo Mandelli, “Fox, tango, ragtime e due finali per capire *La Rondine*” in *La Rondine* (Milan: Teatro alla Scala, 1994), program book: 68-75.

There is documented evidence that Puccini saw Lehár's *Die ideale Gattin* (1913), *Endlich allein* (1914), and *Wo die Lerch singt* (1918), and he most had heard *Die lustige Witwe* (1905), the only stage work of the period to be more popular than his own operas.<sup>54</sup>

The two men shared more than friendship. Lehár's brother Anton tells of a dinner in autumn 1920 at Franz's home where they traded musical ideas as well:

Franz invited my wife and I to a simple dinner party. The only guest was Puccini.

Franz spoke pretty good Italian, Puccini only a little German. Soon the two maestros were discussing things almost exclusively by means of citations of their works, which they indicated by lightly singing and then explaining. Then they both sat at the piano.

Close together, Puccini played the right hand, Franz the left, switching back and forth, or accompanying wonderful harmonies, Puccini-isms and Lehárisms, each trying to outdo the other in chord effects and improvisation. An unforgettable evening.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps it was at this dinner that one or both composers came across the bitonal "slide"<sup>56</sup> complex of D minor and C# major that appears, with similar voicing, in their works set in China: Lehár's *Die gelbe Jacke* (1923)<sup>57</sup> and in Puccini's *Turandot* (1925, posth.). Puccini uses this sonority in a much more structural manner than Lehár, for whom it is used only in transition. [Ex. 11.6a and b]

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<sup>54</sup> William Ashbrook, "La Rondine" in *The Puccini Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994): 247. Ashbrook also reports that Lehár was the only composer Puccini envied, as per a conversation with Maria Bianca Gaddi-Pepoli.

<sup>55</sup> [Franz bat meine Frau und mich aueinem einfachen Abendessen. Der einzige Gast war Puccini. Franz sprach ziemlich gut italienisch, Puccini nur wenig deutsch. Schon während des Essens unterhielten sich die beiden Meister fast ausschliesslich vermittels Zitaten aus ihren Werken, die sie leise singend andeuteten und erläuterten. Dann setzten sich beide an den Flügel. Eng umschlungen spielten Puccini mit der rechten, Franz mit der linken Hand abwechselnd oder sich gegenseitig begleitend die wunderbarsten Harmonien, Puccinismen und Lehárismen, sich in Klangwirkung und originellen Wendungen überbietend. Ein unvergesslicher Abend.] Otto Schneiderreit, *Franz Lehár: Eine Biographie in Zitaten* (Innsbruck: Pinguin-Verlag, 1984), 180-181.

<sup>56</sup> A "slide" is a term from transformational theory in which two chords whose roots are a half-step apart share a common tone.

<sup>57</sup> This operetta was revised as *Das Land des Lächelns* (1929), which retains this feature.

## Example 11.6

a) Lehár, *Die gelbe Jacke*

b) *Turandot*, I/1/5

If we take a quick glance at *Die lustige Witwe*, we can see that Lehár's musical vocabulary, even in 1905, was not as far from Puccini's as one might think. For instance, he uses parallel augmented triads in the overture at rehearsal 5/2 (as well as its recall in number 12), dissonant pedal points at the start of the overture (C under Bb major) and the Act II finale, n. 17 (D under C major and A major). Number 15 ends on an E major seventh chord. It is also conceivable that Puccini had in mind the song "Vilja" from *Die lustige Witwe*, when composing Magda's "Rondine" theme. Both melodies are in G major, rise to an F# leading tone, which does not rise to the tonic, but ultimately falls back down to E. [Ex. 11.7a and b]

## Example 11.7

a) Lehár, “Vilja” from *Die lustige Witwe*

b) “Rondine” theme, I/41/0

The close ties Puccini had with Germanic friends (and their music<sup>58</sup>) led to his wearing of a different sort of mask. The outbreak of World War I, in which Italy and Austria were on opposite sides, forced the composer to openly defend his *italianità*, despite his undercover love for Germanic music and culture.<sup>59</sup> As Puccini wrote to Tito Ricordi in November 1914: “although I may be a Germanophile, I have never wanted to be seen

<sup>58</sup> As we have noted above, Puccini’s admiration for Germanic composers began early on and lasted for his entire career. So it is tempting to hear a thematic reference to Wagner’s *Meistersinger* quintet “Selig, wie die Sonne” in Act III, scene 4, at I/19/0 of *La Rondine*. There is also a *Tristan*-esque passage at II/40/24, in which the “Sehnsucht” motive rises chromatically in sequence, as Magda professes her love.

<sup>59</sup> Puccini published a letter in *Corriere della Sera*, 10 April 1917, responding to attacks on him by Leon Daudet in the French newspaper *Action Française*, writing, in part, “My life and my art are the most valid witnesses to the world of my Italianness.” [La mia vita e la mia arte sono i piu’ validi testimoni davanti a tutto il mondo della mia italianità.] In order to meet with his Austrian contacts, Puccini had to travel to neutral Switzerland.

publicly for either side.”<sup>60</sup> In some unpublished notes for an interview, written around this time, Puccini attempts to define his open-border attitude toward foreign musical influences while simultaneously affirming his Italian roots:

I always believed that the music of *La Rondine* (like that of my other operas) was an affirmation of Italianness abroad...Let us then treasure all the harmonic and technical progress that comes to us from over the mountains and seas, but let us conserve the clarity, the spontaneity and the simplicity that characterize our music.<sup>61</sup>

Mary Jane Phillips-Matz cites in English translation another letter by Puccini on this subject:

“our art is, must be, and has been the ruler of the world [...] And [should] we seek to deprecate it by accepting, desiring, and encouraging conglomerations and intrigues of notes? No, no, no!”<sup>62</sup>

### *simulacra*

Keeping Italian music simple, pure and safe from “conglomerations and intrigues of notes” might appear to be Puccini’s sincere sentiment—until one looks at his scores.

Modernistic flourishes, especially parallelisms, exist side-by-side with singable and danceable

<sup>60</sup> [Benché io sia un germanofilo non ho voluto mai mostrarmi pubblicamente] Torre del Lago, November 1914, in Claudio Sartori, *Giacomo Puccini* (Milan: Edizioni Accademia, 1978), n.p. This letter is also partially cited in Gara, *Carteggi*, 433. Puccini was a Germanophile in a more literal sense as well: he was having a long-term affair with the German Baroness Josephine von Stengel.

<sup>61</sup> [La musica della *Rondine* (come quella delle altre mie opere, ho sempre creduto che fosse un’affermazione di Italianità all’estero. [...] Facciamo pur tesoro di tutti i progressi armonici e tecnici che ci arrivano d’oltre monte e d’oltre mare ma conserviamo la chiarezza la spontaneità e la semplicità che caratterizzano la nostra musica.] Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Apparently this message was coming through the music as well, since Alberto Gasco wrote, in *La tribuna* of 13 January 1919, of the Italian premiere of *Il Tritico*: “In terms of harmonic technique, *Il tabarro* and *Schicchi* advance quite startling elements of novelty. Nothing that contemporary art has produced escapes the studious and astute Giacomo Puccini. From Debussy to Stravinsky, every successful composer has been the fertile subject of his investigation. But (a miracle even more surprising than that of *Suor Angelica*), our composer has lost none of his own personality through his assiduous contact with dangerous foreign composers, the feared sirens of France and Russia; he has seized their secrets and used them to construct new and solid structures of a markedly national style.” Quoted in Girardi, *Puccini*, 369-70.

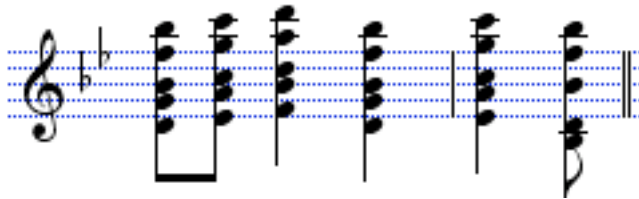
<sup>62</sup> Letter to Carlo Vanbianchi, 10 Oct 1915, in Charles Hamilton catalogue for Auction n. 146, May 20, 1982. Quoted in Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Puccini: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 239.

tunes in *La Rondine*. Here, the composer is following in the footsteps of Lehár and others. But while *Die lustige Witwe* contains a few parallel augmented chords, *La Rondine* has an abundance of numerous sorts of parallelisms. In addition to the many parallel consonances (octaves, fifths and triads<sup>63</sup>), Puccini offers a plethora of lines that trace each other's paths at dissonant intervals like the distorted images in a fun-house mirror.

Parallel seventh chords appear at I/19/14, I/25/18, I/45/33, I/47/9, III/1/3 (with a ninth and a French sixth in the mix), III/3/18, and III/16/6. Some of these are shown in Example 11.8a-d.

Example 11.8: Parallel seventh chords

a) I/19/14



b) I/25/18



c) I/45/33



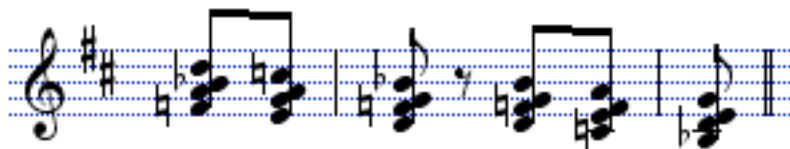
<sup>63</sup> These can be found at I/0/0, I/1/0 (the “Love” leitmotive, which returns in some places without common tones between the chords, such as at I/22/0), I/5/35, I/14/11, I/38/0, I/44/20, I/47/19, III/0/0, III/27/2-3 (over a pedal point), and III/40/3.

d) III/1/3



Puccini also voices some parallel seventh chords in 4/3 inversion, such as at I/46/17, and at III/24/25 where it prolongs G dominant 7 going to C major. [Ex. 11.9]

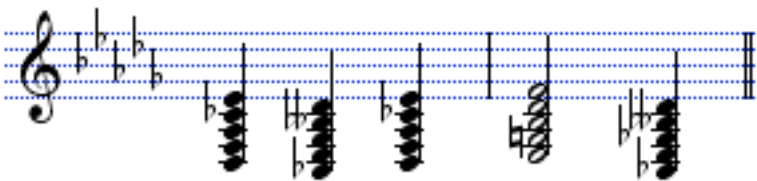
Example 11.9: parallel seventh chords in 4/3 inversion, I/46/17



Parallel sevenths can also occur in 4/2 position, as at III/14/20, or without thirds, as at III/18/0.

Other parallel constructions include ninth chords, such as at II/18/21, and at III/14/15. [Ex. 11.10]

Example 11.10: Parallel ninth chords, II/18/21, revoiced



Puccini even includes parallel tritones accompanying a rising whole-tone scale, at III/31/33 [Ex. 11.11]

Example 11.11: Parallel tritones, II/31/33



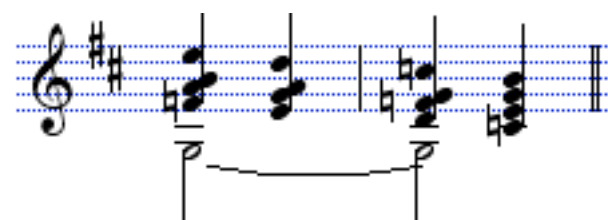
It is also in *La Rondine* that Puccini, for the first time, writes tone clusters as accompaniment to a melody at III/24/8, and over a dissonant pedal point at III/26/0. [Ex. 11.12a and b]

Example 11.12: tone clusters

a) III/24/8



b) III/26/0



How then should we understand *La Rondine*? We might take a cue from Fedele D'Amico, who writes: “*La Rondine* is not an operetta but an opera. [...] But this does not exclude ‘operettism,’ [...] if some manners are taken from it, it is like a masquerade.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, it is an opera pretending to be an operetta, and maintaining a critical distance. Perhaps *Der Rosenkavalier*'s Marschallin said it best: “Ist eine wienerische Maskerad und weiter nichts.”

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<sup>64</sup> D'Amico, “Un'opera sopra un'operetta,” 274. [Che cos'è un'operetta? Una commedia in cui la recitazione parlata, in prosa, si alterna a pezzi cantati, ciascuno dei quali ben chiuso in se stesso; ma s'intende, una commedia d'un certo spirito. [...] *La Rondine* non è un'operetta ma un'opera [...] Senonche' questo non esclude l'operettismo” [...] lo colloca in posizione tale da poterli girare attorno, e se se ne appropria certi modi, e' come per una mascherata.]