

Manon Lescaut

Saturday, February 16, 2008 (13:00 EST; 18:00 UTC; 19:00 CET)

Running time: 3 hours, 16 minutes. 3 intermissions

ACT I

Amiens, France, around 1720. Edmondo, his fellow students and their girlfriends are enjoying the summer evening on a public square. They welcome the young Chevalier Des Grieux, who sings a jaunty serenade to the girls (“Tra voi, belle”). Soon the courtyard stirs with the arrival of a carriage bearing Manon and her brother, Lescaut, who is escorting his sister to a convent at their father’s orders. Sharing the coach with them is Geronte, an old and wealthy Parisian gallant. While the innkeeper shows Lescaut and Geronte to their rooms, Des Grieux introduces himself to Manon. She is intrigued by him and agrees to meet him later, then joins her brother. The Chevalier realizes he has fallen in love (“Donna non vidi mai”). Geronte, who also has designs on Manon, bribes the innkeeper to arrange for Manon’s abduction. Edmondo, who has overheard the conversation, warns Des Grieux. As evening falls, Manon keeps her promise and meets Des Grieux, who persuades her to evade both the convent and her elderly admirer by running off to Paris with him instead (Duet: “Vedete? Io son fedele”). Geronte returns to find the young lovers escaping in the carriage he hired for himself and Manon; furious, he is calmed by Lescaut, who assures him a girl like Manon who loves luxury will be easy to lure away from a poor student.

ACT II

Manon has left Des Grieux and is living in a sumptuous Paris apartment as Geronte’s mistress. When Lescaut arrives to congratulate her on her success, she sadly replies that luxury cannot make up for the loss of Des Grieux (“In quelle trine morbide”). The arrival of a group of musicians who sing a madrigal in her honor does not change her mood, but Manon’s vanity is aroused when Geronte appears with some of his friends to pay tribute to her beauty. The men watch her dancing lesson, while she sings a love song to the strains of a minuet (“L’ora, o Tirsi”). Lescaut goes off to find Des Grieux. After the guests have left, the Chevalier confronts Manon (Duet: “Tu, tu, amore? Tu?”). He first reproaches her as faithless, but soon gives in to her beauty and insistent declarations of true love. Geronte returns to find them in each other’s arms. When Manon holds up a mirror to mock his age, he leaves, threatening revenge. Lescaut bursts in to warn the lovers that the city guards are on their way, but Manon, in spite of Des Grieux’s reproach (“Ah, Manon, mi tradisce”), insists on gathering her jewels first. The delay proves disastrous: led in by Geronte, gendarmes arrest Manon for theft and drag her off to prison.

ACT III

On a street by the harbor of Le Havre, Des Grieux and Lescaut wait for dawn, hoping to rescue Manon from deportation to America. When she appears at the bars of her prison, the lovers once again exchange vows and words of hope. The sound of a shot indicates that Lescaut's plot has been discovered. A band of soldiers lead in the women prisoners, who are each called by name to board the ship, while a curious crowd gathers to comment on their appearance. Des Grieux desperately begs the Captain to let him accompany Manon to the New World ("Guardate, pazzo son!"). Moved, the Captain agrees.

ACT IV

Wandering in a wasteland where she and Des Grieux have fled after landing at New Orleans, the ailing Manon is at the end of her strength and cannot go any farther. When Des Grieux goes off in search of help, she is overcome by terror and despair ("Sola, perduta, abbandonata!"). Des Grieux returns, but Manon dies in his arms.