As already stressed by Davide Ceriani, when dealing with the influence of Italian composers and performers in the US in the very early 20th century, the highlight always appears to be Giacomo Puccini, in particular his “American Opera,” La Fanciulla del West, which was in 1910 the first Italian opera based on an entirely and authentically American subject. The drama, drawn from the play by David Belasco (San Francisco 1853 - New York 1931), The Girl of the Golden West, defines the entrance of the Far West and gold-seekers in the operatic literature.

Puccini first saw Belasco’s play during his stay in New York between January 9 and February 28, 1907, and his interest in the subject was immediate, as evident from the letter addressed to George Maxwell (Ricordi’s New York representative) written on board of the Paquebot “La Provence,” while returning to Europe on March 1st.¹

At the time of the genesis of *La Fanciulla del West*, exoticism was a fundamental ingredient in theater. Puccini, pursuing a modernization of musical and theatrical language, showed interest in American music traditions and was a pioneer in choosing a dramatic subject that had not yet found its way into Italian opera. Within a context of increasing popularity of the early American Western silent film, the novelty of Belasco’s drama deeply struck the composer.²

*La Fanciulla* shows many interesting features; among them, the contact between the Italian composer and the American world, which occurred mainly through the subject, as we said. The influence and inspiration of American folk music and popular music on Puccini and his “American Opera”, *La Fanciulla del West*, has developed into a major line of research, still offering the opportunity for new discoveries and insights. It is a fascinating exploration, from which many elements emerge revealing the intense relationships, at the beginning of the twentieth century, between Italy and the United States, and specifically between Tuscany and the United States.

After the final choice of the subject for his new opera, which would premiere at the Metropolitan of New York on December 10, 1910, Puccini studied numerous American music publications, both of folk music and popular music. By the term “folk music,” we refer here to traditional Native American music, in the style of the transcriptions and arrangements that became largely popular at the time, adapted for educational and amateur purposes. This type of music was published at the beginning of the twentieth century by Wa-Wan Press, an American publishing company founded in 1901 by composer Arthur George Farwell,³ on the wave of the rising interest for ethnomusicological research. I will here consider in particular a notable collection published by Wa-Wan Press, *The Traditional Songs of the Zuñis*. Puccini’s source of one of the opera principal musical theme is a melody of the Zuñi Indians, *The Festive Sun-dance*, in this arrangement by Carlos Troyer.⁶

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By the term “popular music”, we refer to original music by American composers, both from the time of *La Fanciulla*’s action (mid-19th century) and from the time of the performance of Belasco’s play and Puccini’s opera. Such body of music dates from the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century; those pieces were composed and published for entertainment purposes, both for private and social occasions, and both for professional and amateur users.

Puccini’s score is a kaleidoscope of musical exoticisms which recall and are inspired by American music through the songs by major authors like Stephen Collins Foster, George M. Cohan, and even by the musical heritage of Native Americans although it is the Native music filtered from a late-romantic perspective that was accessible to the Italian composer. However, Puccini’s style did not directly originate from ethnomusicological interests, since he was not interested in reproducing a background *tout-court* for his opera, or even in representing an identity. Rather, the combination of diverse cultural elements and musical sources, and their re-creation in an assimilatory process show the international stature of the Tuscan composer, who evidently shared certain compositional orientations inspired by the investigations about the American musical past. The expectations for an “American” opera by Puccini, fomented by the publicity machine in full swing, contributed to the debate over the identity of American music, as evidenced by the many chronicles and reviews of the time, whether they adhere to Puccini’s intentions or not.

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Section of Arthur Farwell’s article on *La Fanciulla del West*, in *Musical America* 13, No. 6, December 17, 1910, 5.

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8 “Writes American Music himself, but Puccini does not know MacDowell”, *Musical America* 13, No. 3, November 26, 1910; “True Americanism in Puccini Score?”, *Musical America* 13, No. 5, December 10, 1910; “The Music of Puccini’s Opera – Arthur Farwell Discusses Results of Composer’s Efforts to Create a Score Which Truly Reflects Western Life in America”, *Musical America* 13, No. 6, December 17, 1910, 4-5. Farwell’s extensive, detailed comments were part of a major coverage (5 full pages) featured in the December 17, 1910 issue of *Musical America*. 
Article on La Fanciulla del West, in Musical America 13, No. 3, November 26, 1910, 2.
Article on La Fanciulla del West, in Musical America 13, No. 5, December 10, 1910, 1.
In any case, the reciprocal influences and inspirations arising from the widespread discussion on these issues should be recognized as an important cultural enrichment, not only at the historical and musicological level.

After the first performance of La Fanciulla del West at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York on December 10, 1910, lead by Arturo Toscanini, with the famous singers Emmy Destinn as Minnie, Enrico Caruso in Dick Johnson’s role and Pasquale Amato as the Sheriff Jack Rance, the opera made its successful debut in other cities in North America.

This was possible thanks to important opera companies engaged in those years in a “virtuous” competition with the Metropolitan.

One of the most important was the Chicago Grand Opera Company, that was born following the example of the Manhattan Opera House, the competitor company of the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

The principal maker of the success of the Chicago Company was certainly the Italian conductor Cleofonte Campanini (1860-1919), who showed broad musical horizons and organizational skills, matured during his experience with the Manhattan Opera Company, which he himself had contributed to create.

In Chicago, in addition to outstanding artistic masses - orchestra and choir - Campanini assembled a talented cast, guaranteeing high-level opera performances.

From a chronicle of an overseas theatrical magazine, in this case an Italian periodical, L’Arte Melodrammatica, we read:

... The Chicago Grand Opera Company is not the usual team of a few brilliant singers with many mediocre artists ... But its greatest strength comes from the number of young artists with excellent qualities that put all the enthusiasm in their interpretations.  

Among the prominent singers of the Chicago Opera Company was Amedeo Bassi.

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9 L’Arte melodrammatica, Anno VII - No. 133, Milano, 16 marzo 1911.
Amedeo Bassi in a photographic portrait by Mario Nunes Vais (1856-1932), 1912; print on canvas, Museo Amedeo Bassi, Montespertoli (Florence); original print at Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome.
The Italian tenor was born in Montespertoli (Florence) in 1872 from a humble family of farmers. He was exceptionally gifted, and thanks to intense commitment, he made his debut in the small Tuscan town of Castelfiorentino in 1897, and then in prestigious Florentine theaters, where in 1898 he obtained a personal success in the role of the Duke of Mantua in Verdi’s *Rigoletto*.

Engagements with important Italian and international theaters quickly followed. In 1903, we find him in the summer-fall season of several South American theaters, and on December 19, 1906, he made his debut, conducted by Campanini, at the Manhattan Opera House in New York, the new theater built by Oscar Hammerstein (1847-1919). Amedeo Bassi’s journey towards celebrity, from the Tuscan countryside to the
European, South American and North American theaters, was thrillingly impressive, and what strikes more is the artist’s sensibility and awareness of the importance of his own art. Bassi’s contribution to the Italian art of singing was considerable; his role was emphasized by many American reviews praising not only the beauty and effectiveness of his voice but also his skills as interpreter and actor. Traditionally such features were highly considered in the US; these combined elements would later become essential qualities in modern theatrical productions, such as the American musical comedy. In addition to the musical quality of his performances, also in this respect we can consider Bassi as a truly modern performer.\(^{10}\)

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\(^{10}\)“Established at Once as Favorite Tenor in Chicago”, *Musical America* 13, No. 7, December 24, 1910.
Among the highlights in Bassi’s career was Puccini’s music and, in particular, *The Girl of the Golden West*. After the New York premiere, *La Fanciulla* debuted in Chicago on December 27, 1910 with Bassi as Johnson, Carolina White as Minnie and Maurice Renaud as Sheriff Rance, conducted by Cleofonte Campanini. Tito Ricordi, Puccini’s music publisher, attended that production and was much impressed by Bassi’s performance. Puccini telegraphed the artist of Montеспертоли the following words: “I warmly congratulate you, and thank you for the success of Fanciulla del West. Yours Sincerely. Puccini.”

After the *Fanciulla’s* tour with the Chicago Opera Company in numerous US cities, Amedeo Bassi succeeded Enrico Caruso at the Metropolitan Opera House on March 2, 1911, in the production conducted by Toscanini, making his debut in the most important New York theater. There were great expectations for his Dick Johnson performance, after the news of his successes in the West. Moreover, Bassi’s appointment was a challenge, since his only predecessor in the same role was the “Italian Divo”, Caruso, who was a star of the Metropolitan.
The chronicles of the main newspapers tell us that expectations were not disappointed and Bassi’s success much increased his popularity.\(^\text{11}\)

Amedeo Bassi as Dick Johnson in *La Fanciulla del West*, from the 1911 Chicago production photographic proofs. Archivio Storico Teatro Regio, Turin; reproduced by permission.

Interestingly, he is acknowledged not only as a performer but also as valuable “collaborator” of Puccini and Belasco for his musical performance and dramatic interpretation.\(^\text{12}\)

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\(^{11}\) *L’Arte melodrammatica*, Anno VII – No. 133, Milano 16 Marzo 1911 and No. 140, Milano, 1 Agosto 1911.

\(^{12}\) *L’Arte melodrammatica*, Anno VII – No. 145, Milano, 1 Novembre 1911.
**In ogni tono**

Il testo sembra essere un articolo di Barabara Boganini pubblicato in "L'Arte melodrammatica" del 1911, che celebra Amedeo Bassi. L'artista è noto per le sue opere teatrali e melodrammatiche, specie in Italia e in Europa. Il testo sembra essere uno studio approfondito su Bassi, forse per una rivista o un'antologia, che elenca le sue opere e ne discute gli aspetti artistici e culturali. Il testo è scritto in italiano e sembra essere un contributo alla storia dell'arte melodrammatica. Il testo sembra essere stato scritto in un contesto che valorizza la cultura italiana e l'arte teatrale, e probabilmente è stato pubblicato in una rivista che aveva un grande impatto nella comunità artistica e culturale di quell'epoca.

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**Article celebrating Amedeo Bassi, L'Arte melodrammatica, Anno VII – No. 133, Milano, 16 Marzo 1911 and No. 140, Milano, 1 Agosto 1911 (Part 1).**

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**Cav. Amedeo Bassi**

Ai vari artisti di Amedeo Bassi sulla scena del Corso Garden dà il felicitosissimo benvenuto a Roma nella Psichedelica fiorente, che tace il noto fondo di suaisateur di quell'opera al raro condizionamento di tale collezione al fondo antico, alla omeografia, il sottotono di un'opera promiscua, e del collettivo piano. Amedeo Bassi apparte stessa all'arte per la sua sottile creatività e la sua sottile espressione, e la sua sottile creatività e la sua sottile espressione, e la sua sottile creatività e la sua sottile espressione...
Later, Puccini himself would qualify Bassi as “an ideal interpreter,” and make efforts for having him to sing the role of Dick Johnson in European theaters.\textsuperscript{13}

This happened on May 29, 1911 at the Covent Garden in London, where the first European performance of La Fanciulla took place, and later at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome, that hosted the June 12, 1911 Italian premiere.

In this regard, it is of special interest to observe the inscription on the back of the Chicago photographic proofs. Mario Bassi, second-born son of the tenor, gave a brief report of the facts when dedicating this picture to his niece Marcella Ceppi Pontello (See Appendix B for a transcript and translation of this document).

\begin{quote}
\emph{Roma. 13.6.1911.}
\emph{Vivia con Marcela.}
1911 - Chicago -
sono i primi fotografi del costume, e degi ategiamenti, per la prima recita di Fanciulla del West, in quella città datata contemporaneamente a New York con 3 senso -
- sempre nel 1911, il basso creò per la prima volta, interpretando il personaggio di Dick Johnson, il bandito RAM FREDD, presso il Teatro di Covent Garden, direttore Cleofonte Campanini, e anche a Roma al Costanzi il 12. 6. 1911, direttore Toscanini, e Eugenio Burzio, e Pasquale Mastro -
- Fece solo tre recite, e fu ripreso da Terenzio Martini, il basso era stato seduto per una sola settimana dal dottor Gentil, in presenza di Giacomo Puccini -
- A te, Marcella cara, questo caro ricordo.
\end{quote}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Mario Bassi, Inscription (1974) on back of \emph{La Fanciulla del West} photographic proofs, Chicago 1911. Archivio Storico Teatro Regio, Turin; reproduced by permission.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{13} \emph{L’Arte melodrammatica}, Anno VII – No. 138, Milano, 16 Giugno 1911.
Giacomo Puccini was evidently a supporter and an admirer of Amedeo Bassi. Through his “American” Opera, the composer also promoted other Italian artists, so contributing to the rich network of Italian-American artistic connections.

On August 23, 1911, Puccini, together with the two librettists Carlo Zangarini and Guelfo Civinini, attended the production of La Fanciulla at the Teatro Grande in Brescia. On his arrival, he received an ovation from conductor Giorgio Polacco (1873-1960) and all the performers. The American press echoed the success.14

Interestingly, in the autumn of that same year, we find Giorgio Polacco conducting the Savage Opera Company, one of the last traveling English-language companies, in a long North American tour of Puccini’s The Girl of the Golden West. Young conductor, Alberto Bimboni (1888-1960), who had recently moved to the United States, also participated in that tour.

It is probable that Puccini’s experience with La Fanciulla del West and the widespread interest in the American musical heritage inspired young Bimboni to participate in the debate on the “Americanness” of the visual and sound imagery, and on the renewal of opera. These direct or indirect interconnections demonstrate the internationality of the Tuscan protagonists who participated in the American musical life at that time.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the acquisition of additional critical and investigative instruments matured in the field of American music research, influences and mutual inspirations with Europe, can shed new light on other topics, as well as create sociological connections. All these perspectives can provide a significant contribution to the fascinating study of the cultural intersections between “Old and New World”.

I wish to thank ICAMus and Aloma Bardi. She provided research information by sending me from the US primary source material, such as several articles of Musical America. Many thanks are due to the Amedeo Bassi Archive - Biblioteca Comunale “Balducci” and the Museo Amedeo Bassi in Montespertoli (Firenze), as well as to the Archive of the Teatro Regio of Turin, for making various research materials available to me. Finally, I would like to thank Anna Maria Gasparri Rossotto, Amedeo Bassi’s biographer, for her knowledgeable and wise counsel in a beautiful morning spent in the Tuscan countryside of Montespertoli.

14 “Italians Pay Homage to Puccini”, Musical America 14, No. 18, September 9, 1911.
Libretto of *La Fanciulla del West*, First Edition (Milan: Ricordi, 1910); Cover Page.
APPENDIX A

Folder 66

1. Lettera manoscritta penna nera

Carta intestata
Paquebot “La Provence”

A bord, le 3 marzo 907

Caro Maxwell,¹

eccoci in mezzo al mare da due giorni - Mare buonissimo calmo come un lago -
Mi dispiacque tanto a dovervi lasciare ma spero di rivedervi ben presto a Torre del Lago -
Vi ringrazio ancora per tutte le gentilezze che ci avete usato, veramente sento di aver un amico in voi -
Salutate tanto e ringraziate per noi la Segarich tanto buona e gentile -
Ricordatevi di vedere Belasco - Vorrei avere una copia de The Girl of Golden West per farla
trasdurre e vedere se è possibile correggendo e cambiando, di tirarne fuori un soggetto - Chi sa?
Non lo dimenticate
Scrivetemi come è andata Bohème al Manhattan¹ -
Tanti affettuosi saluti da Elvira e dal vostro
Giacomo Puccini

P.S. Pregovi dirmi le novità circa Conried¹ e successore.

Dear Maxwell,

Here we are: in the middle of the sea for two days - Smooth sea, as calm as a lake -
I was so sorry I had to leave you but hope to see you again soon at Torre del Lago -
Thank you again for all your kindness; I do feel I have a friend in you -
Please greet and thank for us good, kind Mrs. Segarich -
Remember to see Belasco - I would like to get a copy of The Girl of the Golden West to have it
translated and see whether it's possible, with corrections and changes, to make it into a subject -
Who knows?
Don't forget
Write me how Bohème went in Manhattan -
Many affectionate greetings from Elvira, and from your
Giacomo Puccini

P.S. Please share the news about Conried and successor.


² L'impressionista teatrale Oscar Hammerstein (1877-1959) aveva contratto nel 1906 il Metropolitan Opera House per creare un teatro d'opera concorrente al Metropolitan Opera House. La Bohème debuttò quella sera al Metropolitan dopo lunghe vicissitudini legate al fatto che Ricordi non volle concedere in uscita la copia della partitura di Puccini.

³ Giacomo Conried (1855-1959), direttore del Metropolitan Opera House, predecessore di Curtis-Cavazza alla direzione del teatro newyorkese.
APPENDIX B

Transcript of inscription on the back of Fanciulla del West Chicago photographic proofs.

Roma, 13.06.1974

Mia Cara Marcella -
1911 - Chicago -
Sono i provini fotografici del
costume, e degli atteggiamenti
per la prima recita di Fanciulla
del West, in quella città - data
contemporaneamente a New York
con Caruso -
- Sempre nel 1911, il babbo creò per
la prima volta, interpretando il
personaggio di Dick Johnson – il bandito RAMERREZ -
al Covent Garden di Londra, direttore Cleofonte Campanini
e anche a Roma al Costanzi il 12.6.1911, direttore TOSCANINI
con EUGENIA BURZIO e PASQUALE AMATO -
Fece solo tre recite, e fu ripreso al tenore Martinelli.
Il babbo era stato ceduto per una sola settimana dal Covent Garden
su pressione di Giacomo PUCCINI -
A te, Marcella cara questo caro ricordo.
Mario

Rome, 13.06.1974

My dear Marcella,
1911 - Chicago -
These are the photographic proofs
of the costumes and poses
for the premiere of Fanciulla
del West, in that city -
produced at the same time in New York
with Caruso -
- Still nel 1911, Dad
premiered
the character of Dick Johnson - the bandit RAMERREZ -
at the Covent Garden in London, Cleofonte Campanini conducting
and also in Rome at the Costanzi on June 12, 1911, TOSCANINI conducting
with EUGENIA BURZIO and PASQUALE AMATO -
He only gave three performances, and was replaced by tenor Martinelli.
Dad was granted to sing only one week by arrangement with Covent Garden
under Giacomo PUCCINI’s pressure -
To you, dear Marcella, this precious memory.
Mario
Barbara Boganini presenting at “Intersections/Intersezioni” - ICAMus Session, Kent State University, Florence Program, June 1st, 2017.