

Manon Lescaut Giacomo Puccini | Synopsis

ACT ONE

It's evening. In the square in Amiens the city's students are paying court to the girls who are strolling in search of company. Among the students Edmondo and his friend Des Grieux stand out: the latter is attracted by Manon Lescaut, a very beautiful girl who is getting off the stagecoach with her brother, a Sergeant in the King's Guards, and Geronte di Ravoire, an old and very rich Treasurer General.

Des Grieux approaches Manon for a moment: he learns that the next day the young girl will be taken, to fulfil her father's wishes, to a convent and, overcome by her beauty, promises to oppose such a plan. However, old Geronte is also infatuated by Manon and has planned to kidnap her that same evening. Learning of this plan from Edmondo and taking advantage of Lescaut's lack of attention while at the gaming table, Des Grieux convinces Manon to run away with him in the carriage ordered by Geronte himself. The old Treasurer flies into a rage but Lescaut consoles him: he knows his sister very well and she will soon abandon the student, preferring comforts and riches to a life of hardships and sacrifices.

ACT TWO

Having abandoned the young and penniless Des Grieux, Manon lives in Paris with Geronte, surrounded by every kind of wealth. Nevertheless, luxury and amusements do not satisfy her; she has not forgotten the student's passionate love and asks her brother if he has any news of him. Lescaut tells her that he has persuaded Des Grieux to try his luck at gambling: with his winnings, he will be able to go back and live with her. After spending the morning, as usual, listening to madrigals, music and dancing lessons, surrounded by admiring guests and fawned upon by old Geronte, Manon suddenly sees Des Grieux appear. The young man rebukes his lover for her betrayal but he is soon won over again by her charm: their embrace is interrupted by the arrival of Geronte who goes out in a rage and does not hesitate to denounce Manon.

Lescaut urges flight but Manon lingers to gather together objects of value and jewels to take with her: the guards arrive and, before Geronte's delighted eyes, arrest the young girl.

ACT THREE

Manon, found guilty, is taken to the port of Le Havre to await deportation. Thanks to a guard bribed by Lescaut, Des Grieux tells his sweetheart of the escape plan organised by her brother; however, the attempt does not succeed and Manon, together with the other deportees, files off towards the ship that will take her to America. After fruitlessly opposing his sweetheart's departure, Des Grieux begs the Captain to let him embark with her. The Captain, moved to compassion, takes him on as a cabin boy.

ACT FOUR

Manon and Des Grieux have escaped from New Orleans and are wandering in a vast plain. Exhausted and parched with thirst, Manon cannot go on. While Des Grieux goes off in search of help, the young girl painfully recalls her own past. Immediately afterwards she dies in her lover's arms.