THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THE SPINTO SOPRANO IN SELECTED HEROINE ROLES OF GIACOMO PUCCINI

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SPRING 2017

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Music
with honors in Music

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will demonstrate that the spinto soprano is the only appropriate voice type to portray the heroine roles of select Puccini operas. For Floria Tosca in Puccini’s *Tosca*, Manon Lescaut in *Manon Lescaut*, and Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly*, one commonly finds lyric sopranos, dramatic sopranos, and spinto sopranos used interchangeably. The practice of casting voice types other than the spinto soprano in these operas has evolved over time from a misunderstanding of the vocal demands of the roles, the dramatic requirements of the heroines, and the physical and musical capabilities of the various soprano voice types. By analyzing selections of the full score of these operas and reviewing recordings of acclaimed sopranos performing these roles, the conclusion can be made that the spinto soprano is the one and only voice type that can perform these roles while maintaining the composer’s integrity and the singer’s vocal health. I hope that my thesis will renew awareness of the spinto soprano as a vocal instrument uniquely suited to the dramatic and musical requirements of these select heroine roles. Casting directors must be aware of the specific vocal requirements of these roles in order to protect singers from damaging their voices and to prevent bad singing from damaging the honor of the roles.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my gratitude towards the incredible people who have helped me through this process. I would like especially to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Charles Youmans, for his guidance and direction throughout this thesis writing process and throughout my time at The Pennsylvania State University. I would also like to thank Dr. Mark Ballora for all of his help as my honors advisor. I would like to thank both the Schreyer Honors College and the Penn State School of Music for providing me with opportunities to grow academically and in my craft. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Kiver for helping me to build upon my critical listening skills, Dr. Ted Christopher for giving me meaningful operatic experiences on stage, and Graham Sanders for challenging me to reach my full vocal potential. I would also like to thank my family and friends for always being there for me, supporting me, and loving me. Finally, I would like to thank all of my teachers and coaches who continue to help me to find my voice in this world.
Chapter 1

Introduction

The heroine roles of Giacomo Puccini are typically performed by a diverse range of soprano voice types. For Floria Tosca in Puccini’s *Tosca*, Manon Lescaut in *Manon Lescaut*, and Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly*, one commonly finds lyric sopranos, dramatic sopranos, and spinto sopranos used interchangeably. The practice of casting voice types other than the spinto soprano in these operas evolved over time from a misunderstanding of the vocal demands of the roles, the dramatic requirements of the heroines, and the physical and musical capabilities of the various soprano voice types. In 1986, New York Times music critic Donal Henahan wrote about the increasing rarity of the spinto soprano, critical to the success of Verdi and Puccini operas, since the 1930s. He lists only a few from “after the war” — Renata Tebaldi, Leontyne Price, and Cecilia Sofia Anna Kalogeropoulos (Maria Callas) — and warns of the dangers of imitation, presenting the tragic tale of Elena Suliotis, touted as the next Callas, who “destroyed her voice in a couple of meteoric seasons.” Henahan concludes with hope that new talented spinto sopranos would lead to a “new dawn” rather than “a flickering Verdi twilight.”

In this thesis I will demonstrate that the spinto soprano is the only appropriate voice type to portray the heroines in three frequently performed operas of Puccini. The spinto soprano voice is defined by its *squillo*, a quality of resonance allowing it to penetrate even a large orchestra and to sustain itself across the long dramatic lines required by these roles. Moreover, the spinto

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soprano vocal instrument has a unique ability to sing lyrically in the lower and middle vocal registers while also having dramatic resonance in the upper register of the voice. Historically these qualities were taken for granted in these roles by such pedagogues as Manuel García, in his 1841 *Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing*, and Pauline Viardot-Garcia, whose views we know from accounts of her students.\(^2\) In modern casting, however, that assumption has fallen by the wayside. For example, dramatic sopranos like Irene Theorin or Elena Pankratova are today often asked to sing the heroines of Puccini based on vocal power—the dramatic soprano is robust in volume and timbre—but they are less able to navigate the lyric passages required of these ingénues in Puccini’s *Tosca*, *Manon Lescaut*, and *Madama Butterfly*. Conversely, modern lyric sopranos like Ermonela Jaho or Anna Netrebko also attempt these roles but, due to the heavy orchestration of Puccini at dramatic moments, they often fail to be heard and can damage their voices in the attempt to cut through the orchestra.\(^3\)

Prior to the operas of Giuseppe Verdi, most soprano lead roles were less dramatically complex and few arias required a spinto soprano. Verdi introduced multidimensional heroines such as Aida in *Aida*, Leonora in *La forza del destino* and Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera* whose roles required the dual lyric and dramatic characteristics of the spinto soprano. The Puccini heroines of Floria Tosca, Manon Lescaut, and Cio-Cio-San also require the hybrid nature of the classic spinto voice.\(^4\)

This thesis will survey the peculiar spinto soprano qualities required of Puccini’s Floria Tosca, Manon Lescaut, and Cio-Cio-San, focusing on the breadth of skills needed to perform

these roles successfully. Comparative analysis of recorded performances will form an integral part of the thesis, together with score analysis and dramatic context, in order to provide a meaningful approach to a vexing topic. Evidence that the roles require a spinto soprano will be presented through analysis of audio recordings and the orchestral scores of each opera. For each of these three Puccini operas, I have selected three sections; one with dramatic content, one with lyrical intent, and one alternating between both. Examples of acclaimed dramatic, lyric, and spinto sopranos attempting these challenging passages of each opera will be analyzed against the lyric or dramatic demands of the music and the role in each section.

After an analysis of the score and of the type of singing required to satisfy Puccini’s musical intention, I analyze first a soprano whose soprano Fach, or voice type, aligns best with the musical requirement. I then contrast with an equally talented soprano whose voice is not appropriate for that musical section or aria. I finish with a spinto soprano to show that in each case the spinto can achieve the desired musical goal. It is important to note that criticism of these sopranos is not meant to suggest that the sopranos are musically weak, or incapable of performing difficult music, but simply that they have been inappropriately cast. Thus I have chosen from the most talented and famous sopranos who attempt these roles or arias. In each example there is one voice type that successfully performs the music, one unsuccessful soprano, and one spinto soprano who adapts to match the quality of the successful soprano.

In the end I hope that my thesis will renew awareness of the spinto soprano as a vocal instrument uniquely suited to the dramatic and musical requirements of the heroine roles of Puccini’s Tosca, Manon Lescaut, and Madama Butterfly. Vocal classification schemes such as the German Fach system have been developed to assist singers in learning and choosing suitable
roles and to guide companies in hiring and casting appropriate singers. These systems can always benefit from further shading, however, and this work will aim to contribute to that project. Singers approaching these spinto roles must be aware of the specific vocal requirements, to protect singers from damaging their voices and to prevent bad singing from damaging the roles.

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5 The German Fach system was developed towards the end of the 19th century. It is a classification system that divides singers into vocal categories based largely on vocal range, weight, and color. Other characteristics are also considered such as physical appearance, age, and experience. This practice was originally created to help German opera houses to fill their ensemble with appropriate singers to cover roles in potential productions.
Chapter 2

Floria Tosca

Hariclea Darclée, an acclaimed Romanian soprano known for her success in verismo opera, premiered the role of Tosca under Leopoldo Mugnone’s baton on January 14, 1900. Recordings of Darclée singing Tosca were lost in the war, so it is not possible to evaluate her vocal instrument directly in her performance of Tosca. Greatly renowned in her lifetime, Darclée had many roles created for her. In addition to the title role in Tosca, she sang the title roles in Alfredo Catalani’s La Wally, Pietro Mascagni’s Iris, and Puccini’s Manon Lescaut. All of these roles now fall into the spinto soprano Fach according to the Aria Database. This suggests that, although the historical singing techniques and overall sounds of the nineteenth century differ somewhat from those of present day, Darclée’s vocal classification would translate to the spinto soprano Fach of today. In order to preserve and respect the performance practice of Tosca, then, a spinto soprano must be cast as the heroine Floria Tosca.

An analysis of various moments in Tosca shows sections in which the writing for the title role is best suited for a lyric soprano, passages in which the writing is more appropriate for a dramatic soprano, and parts where neither lyric nor dramatic sopranos can successfully navigate

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8 Helena Matheopoulous, Diva: Great Sopranos and Mezzos Discuss Their Art (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 38. Puccini was known as meticulous when it came to his operas. Josephine Barstow commented in an interview on Puccini heroines saying, “He does it all for you. He was a master of the theatre and if you do what he says and only what he says, it’s perfect theatre.”
Puccini’s writing. A lyric soprano is a soprano with a light, warm, and brightly colored voice, commonly cast in ingénue roles. A dramatic soprano is a powerful, rich, full voice used for the heaviest operatic repertoire, such as Wagnerian roles. A spinto soprano is in between with the agility a lyric soprano and the power of a dramatic soprano. A review of audio and video excerpts by performers from these different soprano Fächer attempting a lyric section, a dramatic section, and a spinto section of the opera will highlight the vocal challenges of this particular role.

A lyric soprano would find her niche in the role of Tosca in moments such as the Act III love duet between Cavaradossi and Tosca.
Figure 1: Tosca Reh. 23-7 through 23+9
Beginning at reh. 23 the music acquires an exotic feel, with the winds in parallel 6/3 chords. The hollow fourths allow for the voices to intermingle with a playful, light tone color while still being heard. The dotted rhythms in reh. 23+2-3 likewise accentuate the buoyancy of this section. Doubling of the vocal line by the first violin allows the voice to remain soft while the violin adds body and depth to the tone, as seen at reh. 24-5 through reh. 24. The delicacy of the rolling harp at reh. 24 resembles the opening of “Che gelida manina” in *La Bohème*. Many of the themes such as the smell of flowers, the gentleness of hands, and the idea of love are mirrored in the Act III duet of *Tosca* and “Che gelida manina” and Si, mi chiamano Mimi” from *La Bohème*. Mimi is a lyric soprano and Tosca, in this section, is singing lyrically.

Lyric soprano Montserrat Caballe shows the natural lyricism of the passage with exceptional nuance. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbcitKuHc2I-4:58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbcitKuHc2I-4:58) Although she sings with very little power in comparison to Nilsson and Tebaldi at reh. 23-4, she begins the setup for the new material at 23 beginning at reh. 23-3. She lofts the G5, meaning she sings the G5 with a very light spinning quality that is intended to sound effortless. This lofted pitch anticipates the “quasi a piacere” (resembling pleasure) that is written over the second half of the measure. Caballe then increases her volume in the recitative-like measure at reh. 23-2 in order to accentuate further the contrast of the diminuendo from *mf* to almost inaudible at the eighth note before reh. 23. She then sings reh. 23+3 with a mezza di voce (a gradual crescendo and diminuendo while sustaining a single pitch) on the dotted eighth note proceeding to a very quiet remainder of the bar. This brings out the dotted rhythm that is the staple of this passage as well as the lightness of the hollow orchestration.

Birgit Nilsson, a Swedish dramatic soprano known for the exceptional power of her voice, sings reh. 23-3 into reh. 23+1 without reducing the dynamic and power in her sound.
The allargando (broadening) in reh. 23-5 shows the power of Nilsson’s voice, but when she reaches the buoyant exoticism at reh. 23 she maintains that innate power of her voice and plows through the passage. The tenor in this recording mitigates the lack of color change as he too possesses a dramatic voice type and, in turn, navigates the passage with the same type of weighted tone that Nilsson does. Because he matches the powerful timbre of Nilsson’s voice, the lack of color change is consistent across the passage and is therefore less noticeable, but still ineffective. The musical effect of the strong dramatic voices in this section does not allow full expression of the nuances in these measures of the score.

Renata Tebaldi, an acclaimed spinto soprano in the 1940s through 1970s, sets up this passage for the new exotic material as written in the score with a large diminuendo in reh. 23-1. She then shows respect for the dynamics and color of the passage at reh. 23+9 where she follows the dolce piano (sweetly soft) markings in the score by using a light vocal effect. She still has the power in the allargando that Nilsson had but, unlike Nilsson, she sets up the exotic, light, material with a less weighted soprano sound.

The last 4mm. of Tosca’s sung music is best suited for a dramatic soprano. Not only is this moment theatrically weighty, heralding the unexpected climax of the opera with Tosca’s suicide, but also the momentum and volume in the orchestration coupled with the high tessitura of the vocal line signal dramatic singing.
Figure 2: Tosca Finale Reh. 40+3 through 41+4
The B-flat at reh. 41 is approached from below, is marked \textit{fff} and has a full, unison string section playing “tutta forza con grande slancio” (“all force with great momentum”) underneath. An approach from below allows a singer to prepare for a powerful sound, especially when the preceding note is in the middle register of the voice. The D in reh. 41-1 allows the singer to create the proper mouth position and to secure the breath support on a more comfortable, middle register pitch before leaping up the interval. Typically when Puccini writes climactic pitches in lyric repertoire, he approaches them with smaller intervals. This can be seen in “Si, mi chiamano Mimi” from \textit{La Bohème} where the leap to the climactic pitch, A, is only that of a minor third. The \textit{fff} marking and the forceful large orchestral underscoring of this B-flat in Tosca’s climactic moment could cause damage to a lyric soprano’s mechanism. Even if no damage took place, the lyric soprano, by the nature of her vocal mechanism, could make the climax seem underwhelming or the voice’s lightness might require compromise in the orchestral score in order for the singer to be heard.

Eva Marton, a famous Hungarian dramatic soprano in the 1970s through 2000s, is able to master the natural dramatic color of this passage by presenting the climax with facility, emotion, and function. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-UiloyLbhY -1:53:10) She not only sings the passage accurately, as written in the score by Puccini, but also adds an emotional effect to her voice at reh. 41-1. She makes the preparatory pitch of D sound like a cry, rendering the B-flat as emotion-driven rather than simply correct, as heard in Moffo’s performance below. Marton’s vocal instrument is never overpowered by the orchestra. The resonance, or squillo, in her voice allows her B-flat to be heard through the orchestra as they enter together simultaneously, i.e., in the manner indicated by Puccini. Marton’s release of the B-flat is clean with no waver in pitch.
Anna Moffo, a leading American lyric soprano in the 1950s and 60s, exemplifies the potential strain that can come from a lyric voice singing this dramatic section of Tosca’s role. In the recording, the brass in the orchestra gains volume and momentum as Moffo’s voice disappears into the texture at reh. 40+6. Later, Moffo’s voice is heard through an almost non-existent orchestral texture for her final line of “O Scarpia avanti a…,” and then something surprising happens. In this recording, the orchestra comes in after she releases her high B-flat—not what is dictated in Puccini’s score. The delayed orchestral entry suggests that the conductor did not want to cover her sound with that of the orchestra. Another indication of this famous lyric soprano’s struggles with this dramatic vocal challenge is heard in the slight waver in the pitch level on the release of her B-flat, which suggests strain or tension in the vocal mechanism. When the voice is supported and healthy on any given pitch, the release should be without effort and should not affect the pitch level. Moffo was a believer in accepting her instrument for its capabilities. She advised others, “I think it is very important not to try and sound like somebody because she sounds great. To be yourself, it may turn out you’re greater. Do what your voice was meant to do.”9 It just so happens that her voice was meant to excel in lyric repertoire, which she sang for the majority of her career. Her most popular roles were Violetta in Verdi’s *La Traviata*, which Boldrey categorizes as a lyric coloratura role,10 Mimi from Puccini’s *La Bohème* categorized as a full lyric role11 and Pamina from Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* categorized as a light lyric soprano.12 Her decision to sing the role of Tosca did damage to the musical intent of this passage by altering the score and, worse, it

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11 Ibid., 105.
12 Ibid., 115.
strained her vocal mechanism.

Angela Gheorghiu, an acclaimed Russian spinto soprano in the 1990s and 2000s, demonstrates the ability of the spinto soprano to sing the finale of Tosca with the same power as a dramatic soprano. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6kTmWYIAcw -3:23) As the orchestra sequences and increases in volume, Gheorghiu maintains the squillo necessary to be heard clearly through the texture in reh. 40+6. She then prepares her mouth space and breath for the B-flat beginning in reh. 41-3 and, like a dramatic soprano, sings the B-flat with enough resonance to be heard when the orchestra enters with force in reh. 41. This is as Puccini has written, like Marton and unlike Moffo, who had to alter the score in order to be heard. Gheorghiu’s voice is described perfectly as, “One of the most natural and individual of her generation, capable both of notable flexibility and of expressing intense feeling.”

When Puccini coached Maria Jeritza to sing the role of Tosca in 1920, he told her that it was her job to keep the audience so spellbound during the aria “Vissi D’arte” that they could not move or even applaud. Vocal technique was crucial to this task. A showcase of spinto-specific music occurs in m. 33 of “Vissi D’arte.”

Figure 3: Mm. 32-34 "Vissi d'arte"
The B-flat in m. 33 must be held while the orchestra plays the sextuplet theme on a “molto allargando” (much broadening). The orchestration calls for dramatic singing in order to be heard on the B-flat, but the following pitch, the A-flat, must be sung with a decrescendo to pianissimo. The following G is marked with a “rallentando” over the whole of m. 34. Dramatic and lyric duality, as well as great vocal flexibility, is required in this passage.

Sondra Radvanovsky, a world-renowned American spinto soprano of today, has sung Floria Tosca in opera houses ranging from La Scala to the Metropolitan Opera with her most recent performance at the Bayerische Staatsoper in the 2016 season. The New York Times review of her Metropolitan Opera performance in 2013 described her successful performance of the role: “Ms. Radvanovsky’s multidimensional, fiercely individual portrayal is grounded in her voice. Elegant and blooming, with a dark weight at its core, her sound never appeared forced, even as it grew during the evening.”15 The Times commented on the beauty of her rendition of “Vissi d’arte.” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pryZos2oOk -3:08)

In this Metropolitan Opera recording, Radvanovsky shows the bipolarity required particularly in two measures of music, which unmistakably suggest a spinto instrument. Radvanovsky’s B-flat in mm. 33 is powerful enough to cut through the thick orchestration marked molto allargando (much broadening), a benefit that comes from dramatic singing, while her subsequent A-flat diminuendos gently to the G, with the lightness commonly associated with a lighter lyric voice. The dynamics of her G diminish until almost no sound can be heard. The orchestra then releases to reveal Radvanovsky’s lightly spun G, which she holds longer than required, displaying her control over the pitch.

Joan Sutherland, one of the greatest historical dramatic coloratura sopranos from Australia, struggles to sing this passage due to the innately heavier quality of her voice. In this recording (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Egs5vGOVtc -2:37) Sutherland gains momentum as she approaches m. 33 of the aria by increasing volume and resonance. She then sings a successful B-flat that is heard clearly over the orchestra. Trouble occurs, however, on beat three of that measure and the downbeat of the next measure. The score indicates that Tosca should diminuendo to almost nothing over the bar-line from mm. 33-34, as seen in Radvanovsky’s recording. Sutherland, however, sustains almost the same volume through the A and G with a barely noticeable diminuendo on the cut off of the G. Though she does not sacrifice tone-quality in order to produce Puccini’s dynamics, she essentially ignores the dynamics written in the score. Puccini coached his singers to ensure his score remained unchanged by performers.

Lyric soprano Mirella Freni, most famous for her portrayal of Mimi in Puccini’s La Bohème, never performed the role of Tosca on stage. She considered it to be too dangerous for her voice. She did perform the aria “Vissi d’arte” several times as a showpiece and recorded the opera. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSiRJ7ccm4Q-2:42) She felt that recording was less dangerous due to the ability to adjust levels in a recording studio. The potential hazard to her vocal mechanism in this role is apparent in these couple of measures. She manages to hit a nice B-flat with even vibrato, a sound sufficiently big to project through the orchestra, and relaxed physical movement, but the struggle appears at the next pitch of the A when her neck begins to bulge and her vibrato becomes uneven. The trouble with lighter voices attempting a vocal challenge such as this is that when they expend too much vocal energy trying to produce a bigger sound than is natural to their voices, as seen on Freni’s B-flat, they push the mechanism too far and are unable to bring the voice back to its natural light color without strain, as seen on Freni’s
A. Freni says herself in reference to larger Puccini soprano roles, "The important thing in this kind of role is that when the dramatic moment arrives, your voice must pass through the orchestra in the right way, not by screaming. I have studied hard to find the right way to do this, without forcing my vocal cords. If you push your voice too hard, you can destroy it."\(^{16}\)

Many singers have pointed out the vocal demands and potential dangers of this role over the years, noting both the inherent difficulties of the role of Floria Tosca and of the verismo style of singing required by it. Ghena Dimitrova, an acclaimed dramatic soprano, won the International Singing Competition and appeared in opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera and La Scala. She observed, “Verismo operas are the most difficult of all. Even roles like Tosca and Minnie- to say nothing of Turandot- can be quite dangerous. Yet nowadays inexperienced young sopranos, even inexperienced young lyric sopranos, have a go at Tosca, which can be very harmful indeed to a lyric voice.”\(^{17}\) Leontyne Price, a spinto soprano who was best known for her performances of Aida, says, “To me the most sensual composers are Strauss and Puccini. They totally kill you because they’re so in love with the heroines they create that you really have to be on top of it, in total control, not to die while you’re singing them…or, as with Tosca, for instance, not to kill Scarpia in earnest.” Price was cast many times as Tosca and was aware of her vocal abilities, which she describes as being lyrical while others described her as being dramatic. She is considered to be a spinto soprano, with her perfect niche being roles in between lyric and dramatic, like Floria Tosca and Aida.\(^{18}\)


\(^{17}\) Matheopoulos, 81.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 157.
Chapter 3

Manon Lescaut

Puccini’s opera *Manon Lescaut* premiered in 1893 with Italian soprano Cesira Ferrani singing the title role under the baton of Allesandro Pomè. Ferrani, a soprano in high demand in the late 1800s, is best known for premiering both Mimi in *La Bohème* and Manon in *Manon Lescaut*. While it is difficult to compare historic recordings to those of today, Ferrani’s repertoire and the few existing recordings suggest that her voice would be categorized today as a spinto soprano. She sings “In quelle trine morbide,” a quintessentially spinto section of *Manon Lescaut*, with the same ease and function as Leontyne Price, a spinto soprano whose performance will be analyzed later in this chapter. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZtGzAUsUsY 0:03)

Puccini defended his decision to write this opera about Manon, who was already the subject of a Massenet opera, in a letter to Ricordi. “Manon is a heroine I believe in, and therefore she cannot fail to win the hearts of the public.”  

While Ricordi did not believe that another opera should be written on Manon, Puccini argued, “Massenet feels it as a Frenchman, with the powder of minutes. I shall feel it as an Italian, with desperate passion.”  

In the Metropolitan Opera’s current production of *Manon Lescaut*, the promotions refer to Manon as, “A heroine as alluring and irresistible as her adored city of Paris.”  

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20 Ibid., 58.  
simple life in a convent but then detours down a path of love affairs, wealth, prison, and ultimately death in the arms of her lover. Her multi-faceted character presents vocal demands far beyond those of either lyric or dramatic roles. The importance of filling the role with a spinto soprano is demonstrated through an analysis of key sections of the score.
Senza rigore di tempo

Frestant, molto  con bravura rapidamente

Misurato ma rall.
Figure 4: Manon Lescaut Act II Scene vii Reh. 22 through 23-1
In this example of a lyrical passage in the opera, Manon is dancing with Geronte. The music matches the weightless quality of the minuet. The orchestral and vocal composition of reh. 22+5 through reh. 23-1 are written for a lyric singer. The sixteenth notes and quick-moving arpeggios sung with a piano dynamic and accompanied by the pizzicato, ostinato in the string section give a buoyant, dance-like quality to the music that is most easily navigated by a lighter voice type. Other markers of the lighter singing required in this passage are the embellishments and trill figures in the vocal line as seen at reh. 22+10 and reh. 22+11. The pp dynamic of the accompanying vocal chorus makes it feasible for a lyric voice to still penetrate through the texture while maintaining a weightless quality of vocal sound. The high C at reh. 23-1, in contrast to the high B-flat in Tosca’s finale, is approached with an ascending vocal line. In the Tosca finale the preparation is set on the comfortable pitch D, which allows the singer to prepare for a powerful B-flat from a secure note before launching up to the climax. The ascending scalar approach to the high C in this passage of Manon Lescaut requires the singer to maintain flexibility and movement while preparing the apical pitch and, as a result, causes the sound production to be smaller than if the pitch were allowed to settle and stabilize on a preparatory lower note. The pitches following the high C, which are embellishments and trills, also require movement and flexibility which prevent the singer from maximizing the sound of the highest pitch. The orchestration is written to accommodate this smaller sound by employing a rest with a fermata while the singer is performing this figure.

Dorothy Kirsten, a lyric soprano popular in the 1940s and 1950s, demonstrates the beautiful, delicate quality of this passage with ease. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8r9v3DAfGfM -0:29) In this video, Kirsten emphasizes the bouncing pizzicato in the strings by performing the arpeggios beginning at reh. 22+5 in a
staccato fashion reminiscent of a woman’s laugh. She cleanly executes the embellishments as seen at reh. 22+10 and she trills very tightly around the pitch at reh. 22+12, meaning that she stays very close to the center pitch around which she is trilling. The high C at the end begins with the short orchestral chord, but the orchestra becomes silent to allow Kirsten’s small sound to be heard.

Amarilli Nizza, an Italian soprano, does not categorize herself in a specific Fach, a practice that is more common today than it was in the past. Based on her repertoire and roles for which she is booked, she can be considered to fall into the Fach of a dramatic soprano. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lMsNHoTChVs -0:03) Her attempt to sing this passage exposes the difficulties of quick embellishments for dramatic voices. Where Kirsten quickly and elegantly moves through the sixteenth notes at reh. 22+5, Nizza chooses a significantly slower tempo and holds the top pitch, G, to show off the quality of sound she can produce on that pitch. She exhibits and emphasizes her strengths, particularly her large, full-bodied sound, even when the orchestration has signaled for the passage to be short and precise with the pizzicato violins. Puccini’s dynamic marking is piano, which Nizza disregards. At reh. 22+7-8 the adding of “h” to the vowel of “ride” in order to quickly articulate each pitch assists Nizza’s heavy voice through this passage. Nizza does not attempt the trill at reh. 22+12, but instead treats it as an embellishment, much like the sixteenth notes that immediately follow the trill. This abbreviated embellishment obviates the need for agility in the voice required by the trill. Because the approach to the high C is not made for a dramatic singer, Nizza is able to hit the pitch but the “d’amor” on the F-sharp and G that follows are flat. The release of a high pitch and the pitches following a high passage are indicators of whether the singer was successful vocally or not on the higher pitches. Nizza was not.
Kelly Kaduce, a modern day spinto soprano, is able to sing this passage with the same vocal function as Kirsten, with the only difference being Kaduce’s vocal quality. Kaduce has an innately darker timbre to her voice. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqiserU7S5c -0:02) In this passage, Kaduce performs the embellishments and trills with complete accuracy. It is not unusual for heavier voices to either utilize a ‘crutch’ to survive embellishments, such as placing an “h” in front of each pitch to add a false sense of clarity, or to slur embellished notes together in a muddied scale. Kaduce has no trouble cleanly executing the passage without any of these potential vocal challenges. She also does not have to slowly establish the pitches of the trill and then bring them closer and closer together as she increases the speed of the trill at reh. 22+12. Though this technique is sometimes stylistic, it often masks another ‘crutch’ that heavier voices use to establish proper trills. Kaduce’s high C is louder than Kirsten’s but, since there is a crescendo written into the score, this would still be stylistically appropriate. Her ascending line leading up to the high C is both accurate and light. Analysis of this section of Manon Lescaut makes it clear that only a lyric or spinto soprano can successfully navigate this part of the work.

If Manon encountered only the light, love, and laughter of a minuet, a lyric soprano would suffice, but, unfortunately for her, that is not the case. A sample of one of the dramatic sections of Manon Lescaut can be seen at rehearsal 12-14 in Act IV in Manon’s aria “Sola, perduta, abbandonata.” This aria was omitted from a 1909 edition due to a perceived lack of action in the final act of the opera. Toscanini, however, convinced Puccini of its necessity and it was restored in the final edition of the score.22

All'vivo
Incitando

(percorsendo agitatisima la scena)

Ah! di sangue sull'acchina...

Incitando

un poco allarg...
Fl.
Cl.
Cl.
in Sib
in Sib
in Fa
Corni
in Fa
Arpa

M.

A. sii di pa... ce............. o. ra la to... ba... n.

Viol.
Vio.
Vo.
Cb.

rit:.............

ppp

ppp

arco

arco

ppp

ppp
Figure 5: Reh. 12-4 to reh. 14+3
This passage muses on Manon’s life and occurs right before her tragic death in the desert. The chromatic wind up beginning at reh. 12, leading to the large leaps from the top end of the soprano range to the chest voice combined with a “very agitated” marking in the score, and alternating pizzicato and bowed strings, all create a sense of motion and drama. The accents in the timpani aid in the propulsion of the growing orchestra towards the climax at reh. 13 and also add to this feeling. The lyricism of a stepwise progression to the culminating pitch seen in the lyric section of Manon Lescaut is absent in this section. Instead the high A at reh. 13 is approached suddenly without these preparatory notes. The next part of this aria is melodically comparable to Liù’s lyric soprano aria, “Tu che di gel sei cinta” in Puccini’s later opera Turandot, but the differences in accents, dynamics, and range require that Manon embody dramatic vocal technique in this melody. One important difference is that in “Tu che di gel sei cinta,” Liù’s vocal line is set in the middle of her voice, a naturally less powerful area of a soprano’s voice. Another contrast is that the vocal line designates a piano dynamic with a marking of “con dolorosa espressione” or “with painful expression.” These differences allow a lyric voice to achieve the necessary effect in “Tu che di gel sei cinta.” Manon sings a similar vocal line but with an approach of a forte interval of a fourth at reh. 14-1 that sets up the fortissimo, accented melody in a higher tessitura with a marking of, “con disperazione” or “with desperation.” These markings and intervals lead to the conclusion that despite melodic similarity to a lyric passage, Manon’s passage was created for a dramatic soprano, or a spinto soprano who has the vocal ability to function like a dramatic soprano in moments such as these.

21 The similarities in the melodies are seen in mm. 9 of Liù’s aria and reh. 13+5 in “Sola, perduta, abbandonata” and mm. 13 of “Tu che di gel sei cinta” and reh. 14+1-3 in “Sola, perduta, abbandonata.” Both Liù and Manon switch between 2/4 and 4/4 meter in these sections.
Ghena Dimitrova, a Bulgarian dramatic soprano famous in the era of Eva Marton, uses little vocal exertion to successfully perform this dramatic passage. This is demonstrated by her clean onset on the high A, her consistency in sound at reh. 12, and her ability to continue to gain momentum after a climax at reh. 13 when singing at reh. 14. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCJ5ge6F4dY -2:30) She uses the chromaticism at reh. 12 to throw her voice into the frantic intervals. The lower pitches are used as springboards to launch the voice into the upper register with power. This same technique is effectively used in the approach to the high B in Tosca’s aria “Vissi d’arte,” as well as in the finale of Tosca. The A at reh. 13 is approached without the lead-in seen before in “Lora, o Tirsi, e vaga e bella.” The fourth at reh. 14 propels Dimitrova into the increasingly suspenseful, accented, loud, desperate melody that will later be reused in Turandot. Dimitrova shows no evidence of vocal fatigue in this passage.

Renée Fleming is a contemporary American lyric soprano famous for her work with Strauss, Handel, and Mozart operas. As a soprano who typically sings lighter repertoire, her performance shows the potential problems that can occur when even an exceptionally talented lyric soprano attempts the more dramatic sections of Manon’s role. Her performance of this dramatic section can be analyzed in the video below. The most obvious physical sign of fatigue is on the A at reh. 13 where Fleming’s tongue is noticeably shaking. When a singer’s jaw or tongue shakes, it is a sign of tension, misalignment, or fatigue. Any of these suggest that the vocal mechanism is not being properly supported by the diaphragm and abdominal muscles. The tension or muscular aspect of singing that is supposed to be settled in the lower muscles is then transferred unhealthily to another part of the body, in this case, the tongue. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1bvJGqo_o -3:10) Fleming also sings the F at reh. 14
with her teeth showing. This trick is less noticeable to the naked eye, but equally as telling of soprano vocal fatigue. Fleming starts the pitch with a relaxed, natural, mouth shape but, as she tries to hold the note, she realizes that her jaw is shaking and compensates to release the tension. She shows her teeth. Showing teeth is an appropriate and effective soprano technique when used on pitches above a high A. This practice creates different overtones for the soprano that help her to reach the singer’s formant on higher pitches. Vennard comments that this technique can be dangerous if not used exclusively on the highest pitches and that it will “shallow” a sound. He says that it is best to modify the vowel and to round the lips and relax the jaw to create depth in these pitches, the opposite of what Fleming does in this passage. This passage that Dimitrova sings with ease, is unnatural and taxing for a lyric soprano’s vocal instrument.

The iconic Greek spinto soprano, Maria Callas, is best known for her wide-ranging repertoire, which results largely from her vocal versatility as a spinto soprano. She could sing the demanding dramatic role of Brünhilde in Wagner’s *Die Walküre* one day and only three days later sing the lyric lead of Elvira in *I Puritani*. Performing Manon requires this versatility within this single role. In the following clip Callas exhibits this perfectly.

As she sings this passage, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YeeOxq4yGwg -2:54) she utilizes the dramatic potential of her spinto soprano voice. At reh. 13-6 she brings out the agitated nature of the passage by singing the upper note of the intervals with force, but also by

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24 The singer’s formant is an increase in energy around 3,000 Hz that allows singers to be heard over an orchestra.
settling into an equally strong full chest voice for the lower pitches, like Dimitrova. This full chest voice ensures that her sound is not lost in the orchestral texture even when singing notes on the lower part of the staff. The tendency of a lyric soprano would be to use a head voice/chest voice mix, but for dramatic and spinto sopranos it is common to use full chest voice. Facility in switching between a heavy chest voice and a resilient upper range is characteristic of a dramatic soprano, or a spinto soprano utilizing the dramatic possibilities of her voice. Callas maintains her high A at reh. 13 with a clean onset and cutoff. There is no waver to the pitch and her sound is not impeded by the orchestra’s fulfillment of the fortissimo dynamic marking. Callas gains momentum at reh. 14 and sings the accented melody with no loss of vocal stamina.

“In quelle trine morbide” is sung when Manon is thinking of her love for Des Grieux while she is unhappily with Geronte. This internal conflict in harmony with the score creates a perfect scenario for a spinto passage.
Moderato con moto d:84

(sì guarda intorno e si ferma cogli occhi all'alcova)

In quelle travi morbide... nell'alce... va de-rr... t'av'un si...
Ed io ch'ero avvezza a una ca. rez. zavo-lut. tu-o-sa di labbra ar.
- cen-ti e 'l'an-case brac-eia... or ho...... tutt'altra co-sai....
Lo stesso movimento

Ott.

Ob.

M.

Viola.

Vc.

Fl.

Ott.

Ob.

Cl.

Fag.

Arpa.

M.

Viol.

V.

Vc.

Gb.
Figure 6: "In quelle trine morbide" Reh. 6+6 to reh. 8-7
Reh. 6+6 is the start of this passage for Manon. “In quelle trine morbide” begins with \textit{piano} dynamic markings and maintains an overall \textit{piano} or \textit{pianissimo} dynamic with light orchestral instrumentation utilizing wind instruments with a pulsing, or doubling atmospheric texture throughout. This mood and orchestration dominate the passage through the end of the aria at reh. 7+17. A fluctuation in dynamic and texture, however, does occur and when it does it is quick and fleeting. The passage, without the sudden instabilities, would appear to be lyric with soft dynamics, stepwise vocal lines, and embellishments. However, in a three-measure span, the voice will switch to dramatic singing with changes in the orchestral texture, \textit{allargando} (broadening) markings, and forte dynamics only to return back to piano a measure later. An example of this can be seen at reh. 7-4 through reh. 7-1 and also at reh. 7+1 through reh. 7+7. In these passages the dynamics shift quickly requiring that the vocal mechanism also shift quickly. This is especially apparent at reh. 7+3-4 where the high B-flat is approached in a dramatic manner, has a \textit{poco allargando} (a little broadening) and \textit{tenuto} (hold) marking over it followed by an immediate sixteenth note embellishment back in tempo that diminishes into a \textit{piano} dynamic marking again. The voice is also being doubled in several orchestral parts forcing the soprano to use more squillo in order to penetrate the orchestral texture while maintaining the supple nature of her voice in order to accomplish the embellishment.

Leontyne Price, a spinto soprano who became famous in the 1950s and 1960s not only for her voice, but also for being one of the first African American lead performers at the Metropolitan Opera, demonstrates mastery of this spinto passage. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MZhONNUW_g -0:16) Price uses the soft dynamic that this passage dictates and hovers over the orchestra through the opening of this passage. When she encounters the dynamic change at reh. 7-4 through reh. 7-2, she allows her sound to blossom...
and easily covers the orchestra with her vibrancy. She quickly returns to her hovering dynamic at reh. 7 only to repeat the dynamic shift covering the orchestra at reh. 7+9-12. She takes time to breathe and reset her vocal mechanism before performing the embellishment in order to perform it simply, with magnificent control. When listening to this recording, without comparison, it would be difficult to imagine that the embellishment is ever a difficulty.

Kiri Te Kanawa, a New Zealand lyric soprano whose fame began in the late 1960s, is best known for her portrayals of Mozart roles, especially that of the Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro*. As a lyric soprano her voice has been described using adjectives like creamy, pearly, and voluptuous. Although her sound is not as dainty as some lyric sopranos like Mirella Freni, Te Kanawa still shows the potential vocal pitfalls in this passage for a lyric voice. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTEoekDCxmM -0:10]) In the recording, the most noticeable failure of Te Kanawa is in the dynamic fluctuation. The dynamic shifts demanded by the score are not physically possible for her voice. At reh. 7-4 Te Kanawa begins the transfer from *piano* to *forte* and as she reaches the arrival point at reh. 7-2, she actually gets softer even though she shows no evidence of physically holding the pitch back. It is still a fully produced sound, in that the pitch is not being floated for a softer dynamic, and yet the pitch is significantly softer than the pitch before. The intensification in dynamic in the orchestra also adds to the problem by actually achieving the dynamics in the score and covering her sound with its *forte* dynamic. It would alter the climax dramatically if this softer dynamic were dictated in the score, but Puccini writes clearly that the B-flat is the arrival of the *forte* dynamic. Te Kanawa has the same trouble at reh. 7+3 which negatively affects the embellishment at reh. 7+4. The embellishment figure would typically be natural for a lyric voice, but the powerful approach to
the B-flat followed by this more restrained figure seems to add strain to her sound. This can be heard as a slight decrease in resonance on the embellishment figure.

Cheryl Studer, an American dramatic soprano best known for her portrayal of the works of Richard Strauss and Richard Wagner, attempts this passage only to make the offense of hitting the high note flat. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dfLa4ZbcgU&app=desktop -57:48) Her high B-flat at reh. 7-2 is flat to the point that the pitch almost becomes an A, an entire half step lower than what Puccini has written. Studer makes this vocal error not once, but twice in this passage when she again sings the B-flat at reh. 7+3 flat. Because she has altered her powerful sound to try to create the hovering dynamic that will be seen in Leontyne Price’s presentation of this passage, she can not switch back to her dramatic sound in time for the dynamic shift to the high B-flat. The inflexible nature of her voice makes the dynamic shifts impossible in the short amount of time that Puccini has allowed in the score. Therefore, Studer must either do as Birgit Nilsson did in the earlier Tosca example and plow through the section without adjusting the dynamics to what is written, or sing flat and alter the pitch and with it the musical intent of the score.

Once again Puccini has created a character and a role which can only be successfully navigated by a spinto soprano. Some passages are lyric to the extent that a dramatic soprano cannot achieve Puccini’s musical intent and some are dramatic preventing a lyric soprano from success. Passages which travel from lyricism to dramatic content within measures provide more evidence that this role is for a spinto soprano.
Chapter 4

Cio-Cio-San

Puccini’s heroine Cio-Cio-San, Butterfly, experiences severe emotional fluctuation throughout Madama Butterfly. At the beginning of the story Butterfly at fifteen years old, seems young even for an ingénue. She begins the opera with deep love and excitement for Pinkerton, a U.S. naval soldier. He marries her for convenience, knowing that he will divorce her once he returns to the United States. He leaves for America shortly after they are married and she waits with anxious faith for their reunion. Butterfly secretly has his baby and raises their son while she waits for Pinkerton to return, which he does, but with his new American wife Kate. The opera ends with Butterfly committing suicide by slitting her throat after saying goodbye to her son, completing a painful course from love, to nervous optimism, to total hopelessness. Her chaotic journey creates a rich scenario for a polychromatic spinto soprano instrument.

Rosina Storchio premiered the role of Cio-Cio-San in Puccini’s Madama Butterfly in February, 1904, at Teatro alla Scala. The premiere was met with harsh opposition and the opera ultimately succeeded only after significant alterations, including the addition of a third act, followed by a new premiere in Brescia. Newspapers headlined the day after the original premiere with, “Puccini Hissed,” “Fiasco at La Scala,” and “Butterfly, Diabetic Opera, Result of an Accident.” However, one part of the show that was certainly not an “accident” was Puccini’s casting of his heroine. Rosina Storchio was the first vocal instrument that Puccini selected for the

role of Cio-Cio-San. When she left the production before the first successful performance in Brescia, Puccini wrote to her in a letter, “And so, my Butterfly, the love-sick little maiden, would leave me. You seem in your departure to be taking away the best, the most poetical part, of my work. I think that *Butterfly* without Rosina Storchio becomes a thing without a soul.” While some writers mistakenly refer to Storchio as a lyric soprano, recordings demonstrate that she has a dramatic, powerful, piercing top range with the flexibility and agility of a lyric soprano, qualities that identify her as a spinto soprano.

([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSAugFOo66w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSAugFOo66w) -0:51) This recording of Storchio shows that quick transition from dramatic soprano timbre to lyric soprano timbre that characterizes a spinto soprano. Analysis of specific passages for this character in *Madama Butterfly* shows that Puccini’s writing of the role includes lyrical and dramatic sections as well as moments involving rapid transitions in vocal demands; together these choices require spinto soprano casting for this heroine role.

“Vieni amor mio!” represents a typical lyric section of the *Madame Butterfly* score. At this point in the opera, Butterfly rejoices in her love for Pinkerton and shows him personal treasures that she pulls from her sleeve. The music sounds delicate, including light orchestration, rolling harp glissandos and arpeggios, and *ppp* dynamic markings in some measures. The vocal range resides mostly in the middle register, requiring a soft mix of head and chest voice throughout. Puccini’s instrumentation along with his staccato pentatonic melodies in this section strongly reflect a sweet and gentle interaction between Butterfly and Pinkerton.

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Ob.
C.Eng.
BUTT.
- ma-gio, U-nu spee-chio.
Bro-sche, duen ein Spie-gel.
Un ve-i-ra-gio.
und ein Flä-cher.
(vede un vassoio)
PINK.
Quel ha-
Vio.
Viol.
V.ca
Vc.
Ob.
Fl.
Ob.
C.Eng.
Cl试管婴儿
Pau.
Timp.
Arpa.
Comp2
BUTT.
Un vo-so ei lin-ja,
Da-rin ist einer för-bes.
Mi spia-
ra.
Euch?
PINK.
-rat-fo-lo?
Buch-es dal?
Ohi-hi!
G. la!
via cordina

(end of page)
Figure 7: "Vieni amor mio!" Reh. 74-4 through 78+10
Sweet and gentle music requires sweet and gentle singing. Lyric soprano Mirella Freni captures the coy mood of this melody by reducing her dynamics at the ends of phrases throughout the passage and by using an occasional sweet bell tone. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45EuHIPreSU -0:26) An example of a bell tone can be heard at reh. 75+2 on the text “Fazzoletti.” The tone on the E does not have vibrato, but has a ringing quality and resonance that sounds like a pure, gentle bell. Freni uses buoyancy and lightness as seen at reh. 75+6 where she plays with the text “Un piccolo fermaglio,” shortening the text and making it staccato. This vocal staccato mirrors the staccato in the strings and winds. Freni uses a speech-like vocal quality in this middle range for some of her exchanges with Pinkerton in order to make the interaction feel playful. This can be heard at reh. 76-5. Even at a climactic moment in this lyric section, where the strings come in ff at reh. 76+7, the vocal line enters after a pronounced diminuendo and Freni comes in gently and lyrically. The loudest dynamic she reaches is only a mf at reh. 78+9. A mf dynamic sounds full in Freni’s voice and, while she still has potential to sing louder, she has no need to tighten her vocal mechanism to maintain the softer dynamics of this section.

Sena Jurinac, a dramatic soprano popular in the 1950s and 1960s, sings this section of the score with far too much weight. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Hh5u7uzKYA -0:23) She is known for having a quality to her voice that can cross between mezzo soprano and dramatic soprano, which makes her voice unusually heavy in the middle to low range instead of light, like a lyric soprano. In her entrance at reh. 74-3, she demonstrates early that she is going to hold on to pitches to display her big sound instead of being conversational, and she does not finesse the ends of phrases using diminuendos. The excess of weight in her tone can be heard as she forcefully smacks into the A and the B’s at reh. 74+5. They are not dance-like as heard in Freni’s
recording and as suggested by the staccato pentatonic melody played in the winds. The bell tone is lost at reh. 75+2 and Jurinac produces a much louder and harsher tone than Freni. Jurinac has to hold back her large sound at reh. 79-6 through 79-5 which forces the vibrato to spin unevenly. While Jurinac undoubtedly has a beautiful, large, and full sound, this music is written for a light voice that can navigate the gentle orchestration and the soft dynamics with ease. Her ability is masked by the demands of this section and Puccini’s musical intent suffers from her heavy treatment.

Maria Callas, heard previously singing the role of Manon, shows how successfully a spinto soprano can navigate this lyrical passage of Madama Butterfly. She portrays the playful quality required in this passage (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxwHVaLDtKg -0:21) using the same speech-like technique as Freni and deemphasizes the ends of phrases to add to the conversational feel. This can be seen at reh. 74+5. Her bell tone at reh. 75+2 sounds almost identical in vocal weight and timbre to Freni’s. She even adds another bell tone where the orchestral theme heard at 75+2 repeats at reh. 78+2 on the text “gli Ottoke.” She does not hold on to pitches to show off her sound, but treats the passage as playful banter and focuses on the inflection of the text and of the musical phrases instead of trying to show off the powerful aspect of her vocal quality. As Callas reaches the mf dynamic, she has an open tone that is flexible enough to diminuendo on the F at reh. 79-5. Callas can maintain the beauty of her instrument with control rather than strain because she possesses an instrument naturally lighter than that of Jurinac.

Cio-Cio-San’s happiness and hope do not last long and Puccini’s music and its vocal demands change in the drama that ensues. “Tu, tu piccolo iddio” is sung at the dramatic moment when Butterfly realizes that her beloved Pinkerton has found another wife. Butterfly, overtaken
with emotion, determines to kill herself. This forebodes a visceral climactic moment at the end of the opera and the music mirrors this tension. The aria begins at reh. 53 with an orchestral wind-up built from quick-moving ostinati, sequences, and dotted figure in the strings. The dotted eighth note moving to sixteenth notes creates a sense of forward motion leading to the vocal entrance at reh. 54-7. The vocal entrance is doubled by the oboes, clarinets, horns, and violins, and while the voice has quarter rests the orchestra emphasizes the offbeat, creating a sense of instability. Butterfly repeats her text with increasing accentuation leading into reh. 54. The voice is then exposed as Butterfly sings, _con grande sentimento, affanno samente agitato_ or “with great sentiment, anxiously agitated.” The vocal line is disjunct in both intervals and rhythmic patterns. The varied rhythms and intervals in the vocal line add to the feeling of instability. The heavy orchestral accompaniment with accents _ff_ under the voice can only be navigated successfully by dramatic voices and spinto sopranos. The high tessitura approached by leaps instead of scalar motion also calls for dramatic singing. This represents a prime example of a dangerous vocal passage for a lyric soprano, as demonstrated by an analysis of the following singers.
Allegro vivace

(S跨界la porta di sinistra e vedesi il braccio di Suzuki che spinge il bambino verso la madre; questi entra correndo colle mani alzate. Butterfly lascia cadere il coltello e si precipita verso il bambino, lo abbraccia e lo bacia quasi a soffocarlo.)
animando un poco

a tempo

G. sola

(con voce di pianto)

(prendendo la testa del bimbo, accostandola a sé)

(sicel) pizz. 

uniti

div. pizz. 

crevo 

uniti

animando 

un poco

I Fizzietti debbono essere eseguiti colta massima forza quasi con esagerazione.

a tempo

Rosent Solletano si er - fa - ren - for dich, für deines reinen Augen, rette Butterfly... schede

Non saper - lo ma - i... per te... pulsícoli puri occhi, muro... Butterfly... schede

*
Figure 8: "Tu, tu piccolo iddio" Reh. 53-7 through 55+3
As Amarilli Nizza, the talented Italian dramatic soprano, sings this aria, she shows the vocal drama required in the passage. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WJIWxnDbtU - 0:38) She comes in with force at the beginning of the aria and continues this strength even on the disjunct leaps from the middle of her register to the top of her register as heard at reh. 54+12 and 54+14. She propels her voice up to the high notes and smoothly navigates through her head, chest, and middle registers, as at reh. 54-4 through reh. 54+5. She especially accentuates the high A at reh. 54+14 where the score marking is “con voce di pianto” or “with voice of crying.” She holds this pitch for a substantial time, having approached it from slightly under the center of the pitch to create a crying effect. The resonance in her voice pierces throughout the passage. This explains why she would be cast to play this role in venues such as the Arena di Verona, an open-air theatre with acoustics that do not allow for singers with lighter voices to be heard. Nizza’s vocal quality highlights the drama of this scene and this dramatic vocal line.

Lyric soprano Montserrat Caballe’s portrayal of this passage shows vocal strain and fatigue that can, if used regularly, be unhealthy. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xvq9BIWI3jU -0:00) Caballe cracks immediately on her second and fifth pitches at reh. 54-6 and reh. 54-3. Sometimes this kind of “crack” or wavering of pitch is used as a dramatic effect, but because these cracks occur randomly in these first five accented pitches, it seems probable that they are occurring from over-pressurized air. Caballe is attempting to sing forcefully like Nizza, but because of her smaller instrument she must compensate by using more air. While using extra air creates a bigger sound, in a smaller instrument the additional airflow will max-out her sound. This sounds similar to Tebaldi “maxing out” the microphone on her recording below, the voice waviers just as a microphone does. Caballe’s disjunct intervals sound strained at reh. 54+12 and reh. 54+14. In order to know
that these pitches were created in an unhealthy fashion, one must look at Caballe’s endurance through the passage. When singers “push” or strain on high notes, their middle and lower voices sound progressively weaker. This can be heard at reh. 55-1 and reh. 55 where her A natural and her B’s are weak and shallow in tone even though the marking is *allargando* and the orchestra is entering *forte*. These vocal strains and cracks show that Caballe is pushing her instrument to create sounds that are not natural to her voice. This can be damaging to her vocal instrument and also lessens the dramatic effect when her middle voice drops out and becomes thin and shallow.

Spinto soprano Renata Tebaldi matches Nizza’s vocal quality and dramatic nuance in this passage. In this recording, her resonance cuts enough to audibly max-out the microphone on the recording device as heard at reh. 54+12 (1:04).

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkgoWAW3Pa0 -0:29) Tebaldi maintains this vocal force through the disjunct vocal line the same way Nizza does as seen at reh. 54+12 and reh. 54+14. While navigating the dramatic vocal line with the timbre of a dramatic soprano, Tebaldi is also able to show off her agility as a spinto soprano at reh. 54+9. She executes the triplet embellishment in a much cleaner fashion than Nizza. Each pitch is articulated and separated from the next pitch. The passage as a whole may be suited for a dramatic soprano, but the spinto soprano’s natural agility actually enhances this figure. Tebaldi is able to project her voice creating the same power as Nizza while maintaining her flexibility of pitch. Because spinto sopranos have dramatic ability, this passage can be performed both safely and effectively by a spinto soprano voice.

“Un bel di, vedremo,” Cio-Cio-San’s aria in Act II beginning at rehearsal 12, demonstrates within a single aria the need for a spinto soprano in *Madama Butterfly*. Several years after Pinkerton has left Japan, Cio-Cio-San describes the day that she dreams of when her
beloved husband, Pinkerton, will return to her. While the aria is a narrative and descriptive text of that day, the underlying mood reveals the pain Butterfly feels over Pinkerton’s absence, with a secondary feeling of hope that he will soon come home to her. The end of the aria presents the most significant difficulty for a lyric soprano as the full orchestra enters with rolling timpani on the soprano’s high B-flat. The approach to this high note, a leap instead of stepwise progression, makes it easier for a dramatic soprano. The lead-in gains momentum with tremolos in the orchestra and repeated notes in the upper middle register of the voice. This is a good preparation for a big voice allowing the soprano to find comfortable vocal position in the upper register before launching to the high note. The middle section of this aria beginning at the pickup to reh.13 poses difficulties for large voices and better suits a lyric soprano. It settles in the middle voice, which represents the transitional part of a woman’s voice, also called the passagio. This section marked “con semplicità” or “with simplicity,” meaning that it should not be dramatic in nature. The winds, the only accompaniment, are offset with the voice, so the voice is particularly exposed. This section is a relief from the more dramatic singing that surrounds it, but requires the soprano to switch from dramatic singing to lyric singing and back again, which challenges both lyric and dramatic voices.
Poi la nave bianca entra nel porto, sombra il monna luna.
Und das weiße Kriegsschiff, schnell nahm sichs dem Hafen, donnert den Salutschuß.

Tutti cresc.

Un poco mosso.

riten
Figure 9: “Un bel di, vedremo” Reh. 12 through reh 16+3
Martina Arroyo continues to sing and define her legacy today as a prominent spinto soprano. In her prime performance years she became most famous for her portrayal of Verdi roles and select Puccini roles including Cio-Cio-San. Arroyo is able to bring out the polychromatic vocal needs of this passage without losing the authenticity of her voice. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spf1xulHgu9Eo -0:04) At reh. 13 Arroyo adds buoyancy to her vocal line making the “con semplicità” passage sound like spoken text. She does the same at reh. 14, creating contrast between this middle portion of the aria and the more dynamic, linear vocal lines that surround it. This juxtaposition of a light, speech-like quality with her cutting vocal quality at the end of the aria is unmatched by the lyric and dramatic sopranos who sing this role. From reh. 16-3 through reh. 16, Arroyo gains volume and leaps to the high B-flat with enough vocal power to allow the orchestra freedom to play the designated $fff$ and “Largamente” or “broadly” without any concern that it will cover Arroyo’s sound.

The Russian and Austrian lyric soprano Anna Netrebko, arguably the most famous soprano of today, performs at prestigious opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera and Teatro alla Scala. While undoubtedly a talented soprano, she struggles in this aria. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPVSq0eApVc -0:21) Ignoring the fact that she is using amplification, she also shows multiple physical signals in this aria that suggest vocal strain.\(^{29}\) At reh. 13-4 her tongue begins to shake as she reaches her upper register. As stated previously, any shaking in the body when singing shows misplaced strain or tension. This means that Netrebko is compromising technique to produce a sound not natural to her voice. She adds a bit of lyricism to the middle of the aria. Where Arroyo’s performance of this section is buoyant, Netrebko’s is languid. Netrebko treats the passage as lyrical singing instead of speech-like to the extent that

\(^{29}\) Amplification is used today in few opera houses. The practice is generally seen as unfavorable due to performance practice, but in outdoors venues or large houses is occasionally accepted.
she runs out of breath at reh. 14 and lets out a labored C natural with a sloppy cut off. When she returns to the original motif at reh. 15, her tongue tension returns when the music specifies “con forza,” “with force,” and her vocal line is doubled by almost the entire orchestra. This type of orchestration with her vocal line proves too stressful for her lyric voice, causing tension and potential vocal damage. While Netrebko shows valiant effort leading into reh. 16 and even through the onset of the high B-flat at reh. 16, she is not able to hold on to her tuning of the high B-flat and ends up falling flat on the second syllable of “spetto.”

Jane Eaglen, an English dramatic soprano still prominent today, is most famous for her portrayal of Wagnerian roles. In these Wagnerian roles Eaglen is able to use the full capacity and volume of her voice, but in “Un bel di, vedremo” she has to reduce her sound so much that the special facility of her dramatic voice is lost. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLrC4Va3ozM-0:00) In the opening of the aria, at reh. 12 Eaglen’s voice sounds muted, not in a soft interpretive manner, but in a way that detracts from the resonance in her sound. At reh. 12+7 her tone is unfocused because her natural voice should be heavily in the chest register on these pitches but she is holding back in order to maintain the dynamic as written by Puccini which causes a fuzzy tonal quality. At reh. 13-4 Eaglen’s quality of tone begins to return as she reaches a more dramatic part of the aria only to regress back into the mediocre quality at reh. 13-3 where she strives to respect the diminuendo in the score. She again is drawn into her chest register at reh. 13 and inadvertently adds extra weight to her sound at reh. 13+1 as she scoops into the word “colle.” She does this again on the word “pesa” at reh. 13+6. At reh. 14 Eaglen attempts to avoid a heavy chest voice, but the F’s remain too weighted. Finally, at reh. 15, Eaglen’s voice is unleashed and produces extremely resonant sound without strain. She also is able to sing in full chest voice at reh. 15+7 through 15+8, which sounds full and lush. It is an injustice to Eaglen
and her extraordinary dramatic instrument to force her to sing with such a dampened quality for
the majority of the aria. It detracts from her vocal quality in parts and from the quality of
Puccini’s beautiful aria, which cannot be fully served even by a superb dramatic voice.
An analysis like the one in this thesis shows that widely acclaimed and greatly skilled singers must be cast appropriately in order to maximize vocal health and musical success. Each singer only possesses one instrument to use and protect throughout the course of a career. The voice offers no simple solution such as reed replacement or purchasing a new instrument to compensate for damage. Casting based on Fach addresses the need to maintain the integrity of the vocal instrument as well as the quality of the musical work. Considering multiple Fächer as the same by casting a dramatic soprano or a lyric soprano in spinto soprano repertoire could be compared to considering all stringed instruments the same and having a double bass or violin play the cello part in a concerto. In order to protect the singers and musical integrity of Florida Tosca, Manon Lescaut, and Cio-Cio-San, spinto sopranos must be selected for these heroine roles.
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Teaching Experience:
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- Maurice Constant & Peter Brook’s *Impressions of Pelléas*; Mélisande, 2015
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- Adamo’s *Little Women* Meg (Cover) 2014
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