

## Puccini's *La Rondine*

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After the success of *La fanciulla del West*, which premiered in New York City in 1910, Puccini spent several years, as he usually did, casting about for a new subject. Finally, in 1913, he accepted a proposal from a Viennese theater to write an operetta, although he insisted that it be composed in Italian and without the customary spoken dialogue. Based on a German libretto translated into Italian by librettist Giuseppe Adami. *La rondine* was written in 1914-15, but the outbreak of World War I, in which Italy and Austria were on opposing sides, delayed the premiere. In addition, Puccini's Italian publisher Ricordi rejected the opera and it was some time before the rival publishing house, Sonzogno, could arrange for publication and a production in neutral Monte Carlo. There it successfully premiered in 1917. In accordance with another of Puccini's habits, it was revised in 1919 and 1920, although the final version performed today is very close to the original.

*La rondine* is the least performed of Puccini's mature operas. It is neither a typical comic operetta nor does it have the dramatic heft of a full-blown opera. Judged on its own terms, however, "It is a light romantic opera, whose music has sufficient melodic interest, charm, and subtle orchestration..." (Osborne, Charles, The Complete Operas of Puccini, Da Capo, New York, 1981, p. 208.)



The plot is similar to Verdi's *La traviata* in that Magda is a courtesan and the obstacle to the lovers' happiness is the inevitable withholding of parental consent to the marriage because of her past. As in *Boheme*, there is also a contrasting pair of lovers: the cynical poet Prunier and Magda's maid, Lisette. The title derives from the prediction of Prumier in the first act that Magda, like the swallow, will fly across the sea toward a bright land of dreams and find true love.

There are several well-known extracts, especially Magda's Act I aria, "Che il bel sogno di Doretta" ("Doretta's dream") and the ensemble in Act II which begins with her lover Ruggero's "Bevo al tuo fresco sorriso" ("I drink to your fresh smile").

For more on Puccini, see [Giacomo Puccini and Giulio Ricordi: An Opera Partnership](#) at [operaguilddfrochester.org](http://operaguilddfrochester.org), Learn About Opera, Opera Performance Essays, No. 47, and others there.