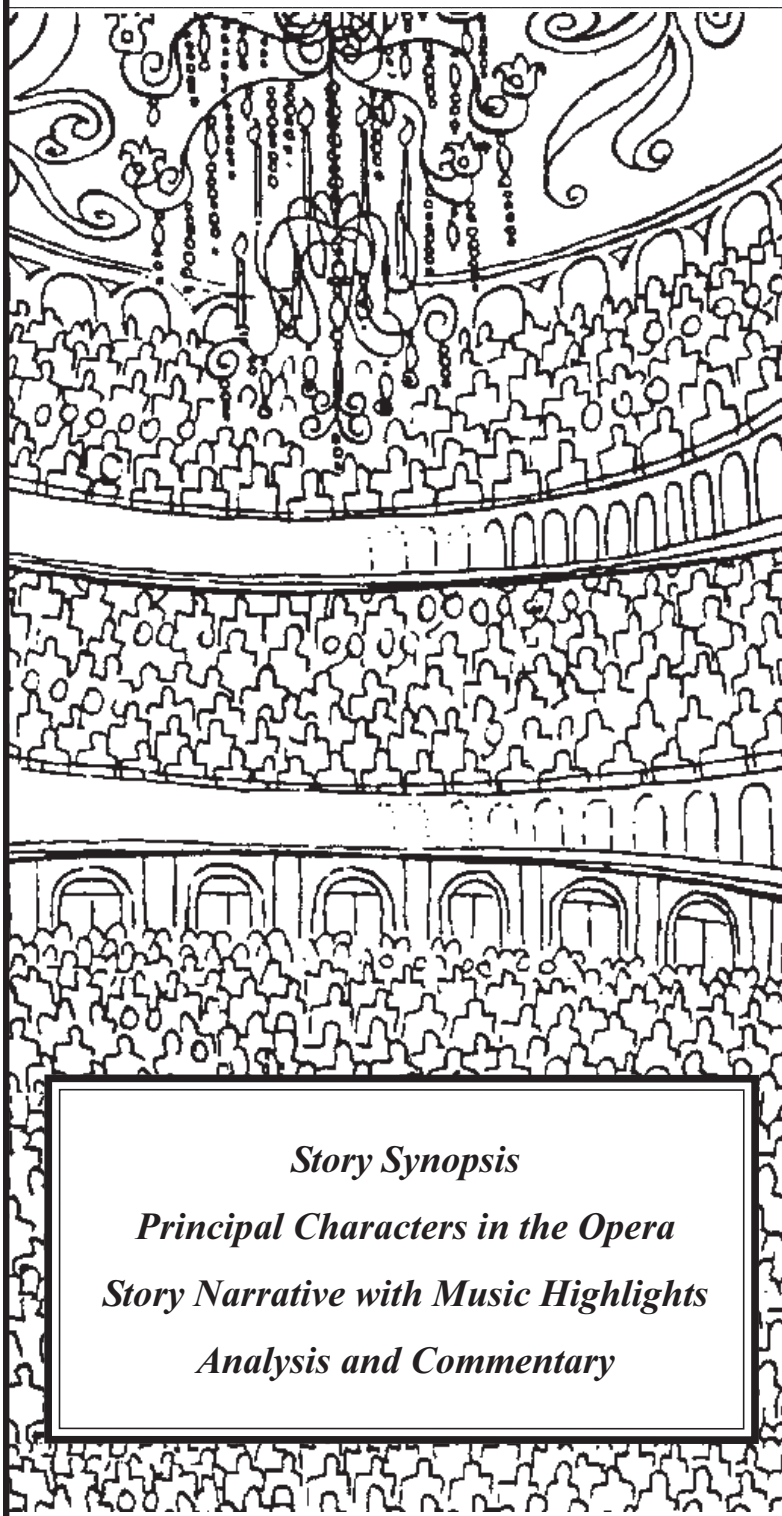


Andrea Chénier

Opera Journeys Mini Guides Series



Story Synopsis

Principal Characters in the Opera

Story Narrative with Music Highlights

Analysis and Commentary



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Opera Journeys Mini Guide Series

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Andrea Chénier

Opera in Italian opera in four acts

Music by Umberto Giordano

Libretto by Luigi Illica, after the original poems by André Marie de Chénier, written while he was in prison during the Reign of Terror in 1794, just before his execution.

Premiere: 1896 at Teatro alla Scala, Milan

**Adapted from the
Opera Journeys Lecture Series
by
Burton D. Fisher**

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Opera Journeys Mini Guide Series

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Principal Characters in Andrea Chénier

Andrea Chénier, a poet	Tenor
Carlo Gérard, a servant, and later a leader in the French Revolution	Baritone
Maddalena de Coigny, an ex-aristocrat	Soprano
Countess de Coigny, Maddalena's mother	Soprano
Bersi, Maddalena's mulatto maid	Mezzo-Soprano
Roucher, Chénier's friend	Baritone
Pietro Fléville, a novelist	Bass or Baritone
Incredibile, a spy	Tenor
Madelon, an old blind woman	Mezzo-Soprano
Fouquier-Tinville, Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Tribunal	Bass or Baritone
Mathieu, a Revolutionary patriot	Baritone
The Abbé, a poet	Tenor

Fiando Forinelli, Schmidt (a jailor), Majordomo, Dumas,
Guests of the Countess, servants, peasants, revolutionaries,
citizens, judges, prisoners, offstage newsboy

TIME: the years 1789 through 1794

PLACE: Paris

Brief Story Synopsis

During the latter part of the 18th century, the nobility indulges itself at a ball given by the Countess de Coigny. Carlo Gérard, a servant, expresses his hatred for the aristocracy and yearns for freedom and the end of social injustices. The festivities are clouded by anxiety when the Abbé, just returned from Paris, announces news that the Third Estate is stirring. Andrea Chénier, a poet, is urged to recite his poetry, which astonishes the guests because of its condemnation of the aristocracy's lack of compassion for the poor and downtrodden. Their gaiety is further unnerved by the intrusion of Gérard and a bedraggled crowd of peasants. Gérard condemns the aristocracy, resigns, and leaves with the peasants, an omen of the class warfare about to erupt in the forthcoming French Revolution: the end of the ancien régime.

Five years have elapsed, and the noble ideals of the Revolution have become controverted by the Reign of Terror. The aristocracy has fallen, and Maddalena de Coigny has lived in hiding, pursued by Gérard, her former servant, who lusts for her. Maddalena seeks Chénier for his help. Likewise, Chénier's life is in danger, now pursued by Robespierre and the Terror because he has become outspoken in condemning the injustices perpetrated by the Revolution.

Maddalena has sent Chénier anonymous letters that beg his help. They meet and fall in love. Gérard's spy, the Incredibile, brings Gérard to witness the new-found lovers. A fight ensues. Gérard is wounded, and Chénier and Maddalena escape the wrath of the crowd.

Chénier has been arrested by the Revolution. Gérard signs a false accusation condemning Chénier of treachery. Before Chénier appears before the Tribunal, Maddalena pleads with Gérard to save Chénier's life. Gérard becomes deeply moved by her profound love for Chénier and promises to defend him. At the Tribunal Gérard is overruled, and Chénier is condemned to death for treason.

Chénier is in prison awaiting execution. With Gérard's help, Maddalena bribes the jailer to allow her take the place of a woman condemned to death. She joins Chénier, and as they await their death, they proclaim the triumph of their eternal and immortal love.

Story Narrative with Music Highlights

ACT I: Early 1789. The Ballroom of the Château de Coigny, a country estate in France.

It is the late 18th century, just before the storming of the Bastille and the onset of the French Revolution. The ancien régime indulge their wealth and privilege at a ball given by the wealthy Countess de Coigny.

As preparations progress, Carlo Gérard, a butler, appears with other servants. They lift a heavy blue sofa, which the arrogant majordomo orders them to properly place in the ballroom. Gérard kneels before the sofa, smooths its fringes, brings out the luster of its silk, and fluffs its pillows. He addresses the sofa mockingly, its opulence a metaphor for the aristocracy he serves: "Compiacente a' colloqui" ("You have heard their superficial conversations.") His soliloquy erupts into a fierce renunciation of the wasteful rich and their excesses: the superficial dandies, the disgusting fat ladies, and their powdered wigs and minuets.

Gérard's aged father enters from the garden, bent and staggering painfully from the weight of a piece of furniture he carries: bitterness overcomes Gérard as he witnesses his trembling father.

Servitude:



With profound compassion, Gérard laments his father's horrible fate: "Son sessant'anni, o vecchio" ("It is now 60 years old man that you've been faithfully serving these oppressive, insolent, and arrogant masters. You have committed your loyalty, your sweat and strength, your mind, your very soul, and as if your life's sacrifice was not enough, you have perpetuated this horrendous toil and slavery to your own sons.") Angry and outraged, Gérard deplores the fate of servitude: "Hai figliate dei servi!" ("You have fathered slaves!")

Gérard's contempt and outrage explode into a tirade of condemnation against society's injustices. He curses the nobility whom he serves: "T'odio casa dorata!" ("I hate this gilded mansion! You are the image of a vain and frivolous world: pretty dandies in silk and lace who hasten to merry gavottes and minuets.")

Gérard speaks of forthcoming social change and class warfare, the destruction of his cruel aristocratic masters and the end of horrible servitude: "Fissa è la vostra sorte!" ("Your fate is sealed! You are an ugly and corrupted race of dandies and felons!") "Figlia de vostri servi" ("Children of servants, and servants alike, here I shout my prophesy"): "È l'ora della morte!" ("It is the hour of death!")

"È l'ora della morte!"

Stentato
GÉRARD



Gérard steps aside when the Countess arrives; she is followed by her young daughter Maddalena, and her maid, Bersi. As Maddalena muses about the approaching evening's festivities, Gérard admires her passionately from a distance, admitting his secret love for her, but lamenting that as a servant he is forbidden to love a woman of the aristocracy.

Gérard's burning anger and hatred are momentarily calmed as he contemplates Maddalena's beauty, his yearning for her love: "What sweetness you bring to my dark soul! Ideals may die but you will never die." "Tu, l'Eterna Canzon" ("You, the Eternal Song!")

The Countess busily oversees preparations for the ball. She orders the servants to light the chandeliers and the entire room sparkles radiantly. Gérard confirms to her that all the details for the ball are in order: the singers, musicians and instrumentalists. The Countess orders Maddalena to dress for the ball, but Maddalena sighs, expressing her youthful irritation and annoyance at the incessant aristocratic formalities and fashions: she complains to Bersi about the suffocating clothes she must wear, the corseted dress, and the ugly hat. Nevertheless, she obeys the Countess and goes off to prepare for the evening's festivities.

Distant noises announce the arrival of guests. The Countess proceeds to greet them, superficially flattering and complimenting the ladies' elegant clothes, and their gallant and cavalier men. New guests arrive: the aged novelist, Monsieur Fléville, the Italian musician Fiando Forinelli, and Andrea Chénier, a promising young poet and writer.

Chénier is gruffly avoided when all attention turns to the Abbé, who has just returned from Paris: all are curious for news about the King. The Abbé's report about the court is ominous: there is social unrest, and the king has been badly advised by his ministers, particularly his finance minister, Necker. Somberly, the Abbé announces a new transition in society: "Abbiamo il terzo estado" ("We have the third estate.") (The estates in pre-Revolutionary France were synonymous with conditions of society: the first estate was the nobility and aristocracy; the second the clerics and the Church; and the third, common man.) The Abbé describes growing unrest in Paris, citing that crowds have hurled stones at the tomb of Henry IV. All react in horror and astonishment at the dreadful news and condemn the disgraceful actions: "Non temono più Dio!" ("They no longer fear God.")

After the Abbé apologizes for bringing such sad news, Fléville optimistically predicts that by springtime the storm-clouds of social unrest will disappear. To soothe their anxiety, Fléville performs a *romanza* he has written, an invocation of the coming of spring, with shepherds whose songs fill the air. Suddenly, Fléville becomes moved to tears as shepherdesses surround him as they perform an idealized 18th century pastoral: its theme is a farewell to the peace and tranquility of pastoral life as they embark toward unknown foreign shores, a subtle allegory of the fate awaiting the ancien régime.

The Pastoral:

SHEPHERDESSES



O Pastorelle, ad - di - o, ad - di - o, ad - di - o!

O Shepherdess farewell, farewell, farewell!

The Countess addresses her new guest, Andrea Chénier, whose recent fame as a poet earned him the invitation to the de Coigny's ball. She complains that Chénier is reticent, prompting the poet's sarcastic response that the ambience has caused his muse to be shy, silent, and even melancholy. The Countess finds Chénier's response impudent, causing the Abbé to comment that artists are unconscionably fickle and temperamental.

Somewhat capriciously, Maddalena turns to her friends and proposes a wager, confident that she can arouse the young man to recite his poetry. While Forinelli plays the harpsichord, Maddalena approaches Chénier, excusing her boldness in the name of female inquisitiveness and curiosity. She tries to provoke Chénier to improvise an ode to a nun, or a song to a bridesmaid. Chénier replies with indignation and sarcasm, admonishing Maddalena that poetry is the

supreme inspiration of the soul: true poetry cannot be commanded, for it is capricious like love, a jealous and vain sentiment that must be inspired.

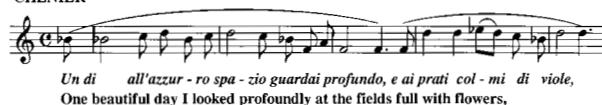
At Chénier's mention of love, Maddalena and the young ladies burst into mocking laughter. The poet has fallen into Maddalena's trap. She rashly and self-confidently turns to the guests and prides her success in teasing the poet to invoke love — without the inspiration from the poet's Muse.

Chénier becomes disturbed and insulted. They have flaunted him and wounded his heart, the poet's refuge for his profound ideals and sentiments. Indignantly, he announces that he will indeed recite a poem about love, but he cautions them that love is a pure sentiment from the soul that must never be scorned.

Chénier begins his "Improviso" ("Improvisation"), a glorification of the beauty of nature: "Un dì all'azzurro spazio guardai profondo" ("One beautiful day I looked profoundly at the fields full with flowers. The meadows were resplendent with violets that were bathed in the golden rays of the sun, and the world glistened in a golden mantle. The whole earth seemed an enormous chest of jewels and treasures.")

Improviso:

Andante
CHÉNIER



But nature and love are synonymous ideals to the poet: "Su dalla terra a la mia fronte, veniva una carezza viva, un bacio" ("I felt a warm caress, a kiss that sprung from the earth and embraced me"). "Gridai, vinto d'amor: T'amo, tu che mi baci, divinamente bella, o patria mia!" ("I called out, overwhelmed with love: I love you, you who kissed me, divine in your beauty, oh, my beloved land!")

"Su dalla terra alla mia fronte"

Cantato
CHÉNIER



Chénier's poetic improvisation invokes nature, love and human compassion. His ode to love addresses human oppression and social injustice, and he transforms his poetry into a political tirade that condemns the aristocracy, the rich, and the clerics: "Filled with love, I wanted to pray. I entered a nearby church and there I saw a priest gathering alms around the saints and the Virgin, turning a deaf ear to a

trembling old man, who, with hands outstretched, begged in vain for some bread to satisfy his hunger.”) The Abbé rises, outraged at Chénier’s blasphemous condemnation of the church.

Chénier explains that he was bewildered when he walked into a hovel and saw a wretched man invoking evil, cursing the taxes on his soil, the bare pittance he received for his toil, and hating all that was sacred; he blamed the church and God for bringing suffering to his children.

All the guests become enraged and furious at Chénier’s denunciations, realizing that they are specifically directed to them. Only Gérard, listening in the rear of the room, becomes profoundly moved by the poet’s words. When Chénier resumes, the astonished guests pretend not to listen to him.

Chénier inquires how humanity will survive its misfortune? In such poverty, what have the aristocrats done? He turns to Maddalena and acknowledges that in her eyes, he senses deep and tender understanding, a compassion and pity like that of an angel, and a sense of redeeming love: “Ecco la bellezza della vita,” (“Here is the beauty of life!”) He cautions Maddalena: “O giovinetta bella, d’un poeta non disprezzate il detto: Udite! Non conoscete amor, amor, divino dono, non lo schernir, del mondo anima e vita e l’Amor!” (“Oh beautiful young lady, do not mock the words of a poet, but listen! You do not understand love. Love is a divine gift, the life and soul of the world!”)

Chénier’s “Improviso” about love and compassion is a plea for the loveless souls of society, those condemned by the very aristocracy in his presence: it has been their tyranny, oppression, selfishness, and apathy that has failed to relieve the misery and suffering of the poor.

Chénier’s sudden inspiration is a thunderous tirade of fiery social idealism and liberal sentiments, ideals that flabbergast and unnerve his listeners; they fear the truth as well as the political realities of which he has spoken.

Maddalena has become stirred by the poet’s ardor and apologizes to him for her capriciousness. Chénier abruptly departs, angry and resentful. The agitated Countess excuses Maddalena’s behavior to the guests as capricious and somewhat too romantic.

The gavotte music resumes, and the Countess commands her guests to return to their festivities: take partners and dance.

Gavotte



Indistinct moaning is heard in the distance. It is a group of peasants: “La notte il giorno portiamo intorno il dolore” (“Night and day we bear sorrow.”)

The Countess interrupts the gavotte to listen. Suddenly, a peasant mob of ragged men and women burst into the

ballroom, hungry and pleading for bread. Their leader is Gérard, the de Coigny butler, who infuriates the Countess by announcing that he let these suffering peasants into the chateau, and compassionately urges her to end their poverty. The Countess orders that Gérard and the peasants depart.

To excuse his son's impudence, Gérard's father rushes before the Countess and falls to his knees. Gérard raises his father, embraces him, and urges him to join the peasants, proudly asserting that the Countess does not heed the voices of the damned. Gérard announces that will no longer serve the Countess: that he leaves for the noble duty of serving these suffering people. Proud of his new freedom, Gérard throws down his livery: "Gone is the servant! Free, Free, Free is the slave!" Gérard leads his father away, followed by the hungry and impoverished peasants.

The Countess sits breathless and raging. She tries to excuse Gérard's insolence: "Quel Gérard, ha rovinato il leggere" ("That Gérard, reading has ruined him"). Paradoxically, the Countess defends herself as a generous and benevolent woman: "I gave alms to the poor every day!") And she proudly claims that she made the wearing of livery a symbol of dignity.

The Countess recovers from the embarrassment and intrusion of Gérard and the peasants, and immediately orders the majordomo to resume the gavotte without further interruption: "Ritorni l'allegria!" ("Resume the gaiety!")

The guests dutifully obey their hostess and resume the gavotte, the elegant dance an ominous epitaph to the ancien régime: a life of wealth, power and privilege that will soon have vanished forever.

***ACT II: June 1794. Five years later.
In front of the Café Hottot in Paris.***

In the square, there is a bust of Marat, the slain hero of the Revolution who espoused radical action. There is the terrace of the Feuillants, and the Perronet bridge that spans the Seine and leads to the Palace of the Five Hundred.

Five years have passed since the ball at the Chateau de Coigny. The Revolution began shortly thereafter with the storming of the Bastille in July, 1789. After the overthrow of the monarchy, the Reign of Terror was instituted to combat internal chaos and anarchy, as well as threats to France's survival from foreign European powers.

It is June 1794. Robespierre heads the Tribunal of the Reign of Terror. Chénier is under suspicion for his avowed opposition to Robespierre; he believes that the Revolution had achieved its immediate objectives when it established the First Republic and law and order. Nevertheless, Robespierre maintains power as head of the Tribunal of the Reign of Terror, determined to destroy all enemies of the Revolution.

Chénier is seated alone at a table at the Café Hottot, busily writing. Near the statue of Marat, two Revolutionists, Mathieu and Orazio Coclite, are in conversation, Mathieu complaining that there is always dust on the bust of Marat, and that the paper he has just bought from ragged newsboys is five months old.

Bersi appears, visibly disturbed because she is being followed by the Incredible, a spy of the Revolution. She confronts the Incredible but he defends his actions: “Osservatori dello spirito pubblico” (“Special observers of the moods of the public.”) Bersi proudly proclaims that she is fearless, for they are both children of the revolution who fight for the cause of liberty. Besides, she loves her new life that defies the rules of convention and propriety: a life of excitement, gaiety, pleasure and abandon.

“Amor viver così”

Allegro brillante
BERSI



But life in Revolutionary France has its ambivalences: there is blood, death, and terror, as well as wine, champagne, love, gambling, and laughter. A crowd excitedly shouts as it chases a cart filled with prisoners condemned to the guillotine.

The Incredible muses to himself as Bersi departs, certain that he has seen her with the blonde woman whom he seeks. He writes rapidly in his notebook, noting that Bersi has acted suspiciously, that her loyalty is in doubt, that she pretends to be a prostitute, and also, that she has tried to attract Chénier's attention. As the spy disappears, he notes that Chénier is presumably awaiting someone, seemingly agitated and nervous.

Chénier's friend Roucher arrives and anxiously advises him that he is in danger and being spied upon. Roucher gives Chénier a passport and urges him to flee to safety before he is arrested. But Chénier refuses. He invokes destiny, a secret and mysterious power that judges good and evil, and seems to be guiding his future: the divine power that determines who will be a poet, or who will be a soldier. Perhaps his destiny is to find love, to unite his poetic soul with a woman who will call to him: “Credi all'amor; Chénier! Tu sei amato!” (Believe in love, Chénier! You are loved!”)

“Bella ideale”

CHÉNIER



Chénier reveals that a woman has sent him anonymous letters, words that vibrate with passion. Roucher examines the letter and smiles at its signature: “Hope.” Roucher again tries to persuade Chénier to take the passport and flee, suggesting that his illusive dream of love, what he proclaims as his destiny, is but a letter from a courtesan. Momentarily, Roucher succeeds in convincing Chénier to accept the passport.

A crowd collects on the Perronet bridge anticipating its leader and idol, Robespierre. Gérard is hailed as he leads the crowd, and then Robespierre appears on the bridge, inspiring the crowd’s praise: “Viva Robespierre! Evviva!”

“Viva Robespierre! Evviva!”



While the crowd cheers for Robespierre, the Incredible draws Gérard aside, the spy requesting confirmation that the woman he seeks has blue eyes and blonde hair. With determination, Gérard vows he will pay the spy well if he finds the woman and brings her to him. Gérard has become obsessed by his inner torture: it is Maddalena he seeks, the woman he served in the old world of the ancien régime, and the woman he has lusted for throughout his entire life. Using the power he has now acquired as a leader of the Revolution, he will possess Maddalena de Coigny, by force if necessary.

From across the Tuilleries Garden, a group of Merveilleuses appear, among them, Bersi, pretending to be one of the courtesans. She approaches Roucher and whispers that she is being watched, but intriguingly suggests that it is important that Chénier remain at the Café. Suddenly the Incredible steps boldly between them. He suggests a rendezvous with Bersi, a presumed courtesan, and both proceed toward a subterranean room of the Café. While Roucher again urges Chénier to escape, Bersi reappears; she approaches Chénier while the Incredible listens from behind a vase of flowers.

Bersi tells Chénier that shortly a woman will arrive to meet him, a woman threatened with danger: her name is “hope.” Roucher tries to convince Chénier that it is a trap, but the poet insists on remaining to meet the anonymous woman.

It is night. Mathieu lights the lantern at Marat’s altar at the bridge at the head of the Cours-La-Reine, all the while singing the revolutionary song, the Carmagnole. The Incredible remains hidden as he observes what appears to be a woman cautiously crossing the Perronet bridge.

The disguised woman is Maddalena de Coigny, wrapped in a cloak, and visibly frightened. While the Incredible eavesdrops, she approaches Chénier and addresses him with choked emotion. Chénier inquires who the mysterious woman is? To help him remember, Maddalena speaks words

familiar to Chénier, the words he addressed to her five years ago at the ball at the Chateau de Coigny: “Non conoscete amor! Amor divino dono non lo schernir” (“You do not know love! Love, divine gift of the gods, do not scorn it.”)

Maddalena removes her cloak and reveals herself to the astonished Chénier. Meanwhile, the Incredible becomes ecstatic at his discovery and rushes off to tell Gérard that he has found his prey. Chénier questions Maddalena about her mysterious letters to him. Maddalena pours out her desperate soul to Chénier, a woman of the exiled aristocracy, in danger, and hunted by the Reign of Terror. Chénier, a man esteemed by the Revolution, represents her only hope for survival in the hostile world that has engulfed her. Maddalena reveals that in her despair she dreamed only of Chénier, her only hope for salvation. She admits that the words of love she wrote to him were dictated from her heart, a divine voice that said to her, “He will protect you!”

“Erava possente”

Cantabile
MADDALENA

E - ra - va - te - pos - sen - te, io in - ve - ce minnia - ca - ta;
You had become famous while I instead was in danger;

pur nel-la mia tri - stezza pensai so - vente d'impetrar da voi pace e sal - vez - za,
But in my sadness I often dreamed that you would bring me peace and salvation,

Maddalena explains that she desperately needs Chénier's protection and guidance, fearful that she has been secretly followed: “Udite! Son sola! Son sola e minniaciata! Son sola al mondo! Ed ho paura! Proteggermi volete? Spero in voi! (“Listen, I am alone. I am alone and in danger. I am alone in the world and I am afraid. Will you protect me? My only hope is in you!”)

Chénier and Maddalena ecstatically declare their love for each other, a sublime moment that expresses the impassioned poetry of love united with equally rapturous music.

“Ora soave”

Tranquillo
CHÉNIER

O - ra so - a - ve, su - bli - me ora d'a - mo - re!
O rapturous sublime moment of love!

“Ora soave, sublime ora d’amore!” (“Gentle moment, sublime moment of love. The power of the heart banishes fear.”) “Mi fai puro il cuore d’ogni vita! Bramo la vita, e non temo la morte. Ah rimani, infinita” (“You cleanse my heart of all evil! I yearn to live and death holds no fear! Oh remain forever.”)

Both Chénier and Maddalena feel redeemed through their new-found love, a transcendence that has immediately become immortal and eternal, a love that even death cannot destroy: “Fino alla morte insieme” (“Until death together.”)

The Incredible, after discovering Maddalena, sought Gérard and has brought his client to redeem his prey. Gérard bursts in on the lovers, recognizes Maddalena, and attempts to seize her, but he does not immediately recognize Chénier. Roucher threatens the Incredible with pistols, causing the spy to prudently flee and seek help.

Gérard and Chénier draw swords. In their duel, Gérard is wounded. When Gérard recognizes the esteemed patriot-poet, a man he respects and admires, he urges Chénier to escape, warning him that the Tribunal has condemned him as an enemy and counterrevolutionary. And unaware that he is Chénier's rival, he nobly urges him to protect Maddalena.

The Incredible arrives with guards, and a crowd assembles. Gérard is asked the name of his assailant: he responds "ignoto" ("I do not know.") Mathieu announces that the assailant must surely be an enemy of the Revolution, a Girondist, prompting the menacing crowd to shout: "Morte! Morte! Morte ai Girondini!" ("Death! Death! Death to the Girondists!")

ACT III: The Revolutionary Tribunal – Several weeks later.

The Reign of Terror continues its tyranny and oppression: there are no more gavottes, only anthems of the Revolution. A tricolored flag in the hall of the Revolutionary Tribunal reminds the populace of their duty: "Citizens, our country is in danger."

Mathieu harangues the crowd that has gathered for the forthcoming Tribunal; he condemns traitors and the European powers conspiring against France. He urges the crowd to contribute money and soldiers to the Revolution, but there is only silence. After invoking fear of the guillotine, some come forward and throw objects and money into an urn.

Sacrifice for the Revolution:

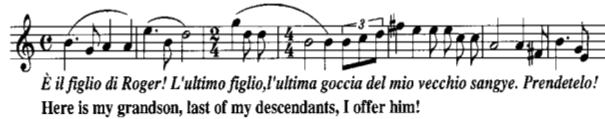


Gérard has recovered from the wound he received in his duel with Chénier and is enthusiastically hailed by his compatriots. He makes a fervent plea for money and support for the Revolution: gold and blood. He condemns France's threatening enemies: Britain, Austria, and Prussia, the coalition that fears that the ideals of the French Revolution might spread to their population and destroy their monarchies. The women, moved by Gérard's appeal, contribute jewels and money.

Gérard calls on the mothers of France to offer their sons to fight for their country. Madelon, an old blind woman, steps forward and volunteers her grandson to defend France against her enemies, the last survivor of her family.

Madelon:

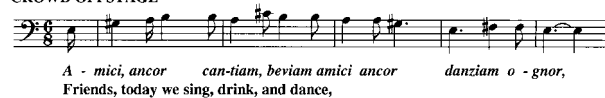
Piu mosso
MADELON



The crowd slowly disperses. Gérard seats himself at a table and reads a list of those to appear before the Tribunal. The Carmignole is heard from outside, the crowd singing about the glory of their revolutionary ideals: long live the roar of the gun and their fight for liberty.

Carmagnole:

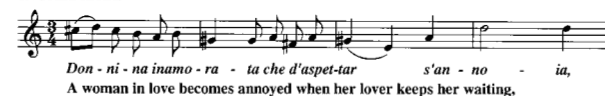
Allegro
CROWD OFFSTAGE



The Incredible appears and ecstatically advises Gérard that Chénier has been apprehended. Cynically, the Incredible tells Gérard that the woman he seeks — Maddalena — is passionately in love with Chénier: Gérard may possess her body, but never her soul. But he urges Gérard to be patient, predicting that when Maddalena learns that Chénier has been arrested, she will reappear and attempt to save him.

“Donnina innamorata”

Allegretto
INCREDIBILE



As the Incredible departs, he urges Gérard to prepare the accusation against Chénier; he will soon appear before the Tribunal. Alone, Gérard hesitates. His conscience has been awakened and he reflects on the hypocrisy of his ideals. Gérard has become a cynic, fully recognizing the ironies that have transformed the Revolution's principles; he is in conflict, his faith undermined with doubt. Has the Revolution really changed society? He concludes that society has not changed, but only the names of its masters. Has the Revolution changed him? Gérard realizes that in revenge lust and obsessive passion have become his new masters.

“Nemico della patria”

a piacere
GÉRARD



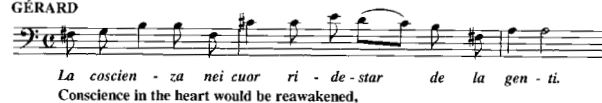
Gérard reads the accusation against Chénier, lies to feed the people's obsession for revenge: "Nemico della patria?" ("A traitor to his country?") The accusation condemns Chénier as an alien because he was born in Constantinople, a student at Saint-Cyr, a soldier, a traitor because he befriended Dumouriez, and a poet who subverted the minds of the French people.

Gérard becomes emotionally distraught and broods over his moral conflict. He questions his actions and conscience, a revolutionary idealism that has been transformed into lechery, his sense of honor destroyed. He once lived with pride in his noble convictions, but now merely recycles hatred: "Son sempre un servo! Ho mutato padrone!" ("I'm still a servant. 'I've only changed my master!") But even worse, he has become a slave who has sold his soul to violent passions; he has become a murderer, one who weeps and trembles while he kills. He was a faithful son of the Revolution, the first to heed its noble cry of freedom, but now he has sold his ideals and soul to the devil.

Gérard has lost faith in the very ideals that represented his passionate humanistic dreams, dreams that have now vanished in blood.

"La coscienza nel cuor"

GÉRARD



The Revolution was determined to reawaken conscience in the hearts of people, bring joy and hope to the poor as it dried the tears of the downtrodden. Its purpose was to create a new paradise of noble ideals, in which mankind was united in a fraternal embrace of love, and all men were transformed into divine goodness.

But reason has surrendered to passions: in a bitter irony, Gérard has become a slave to hatred, lust and desire. Passions and sensuality have become Gérard's masters, and he weeps for humanity, as well as for himself.

The Incredible returns. Gérard, fearing the Tribunal, signs the accusation against Chénier, and then hands a list of the accused to the Clerk of the Tribunal.

Maddalena learned of Chénier's arrest; she appears before Gérard to plead for her lover's freedom. Gérard expected her, admitting that when he failed to find her, he imprisoned Chénier, knowing that she would come to help her lover.

Maddalena becomes frightened by Gérard's vehemence and arrogance, and ashamed by her own weakness. Disdainfully, she tells Gérard that he is victorious: he has won his revenge by condemning Chénier. But Gérard refutes her, because she is his victory prize. Henceforth, her destiny is bound to his because he cannot live without her, a reversal of fortunes in which he now has power over her destiny.

Gérard reveals that he loved Maddalena from the time they were children. But when he grew up he learned his horrible destiny; he was handed his livery and watched in silence as she learned minuets. Her beauty and grace maddened him, driving him to evil thoughts. But that no longer matters, for Gérard has achieved power: the former servant is now her master; “I want to run my fingers through the lovely and silken softness of your golden hair!” Gérard has revealed the secrets in his lustful soul. He asks Maddalena what she will do to repel him?

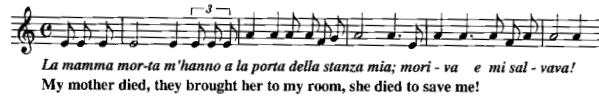
Maddalena tries to escape from him, but he forcefully prevents her from leaving. She is defeated and demoralized, but she has one purpose: she must free Chénier. In exchange, Maddalena offers her body and soul to Gérard.

Suddenly, Gérard becomes compassionate, profoundly stirred by the sacrifice she is prepared to make for Chénier: “Come sa amare!” (“How much she loves him!”)

Maddalena appeals to Gérard’s sympathy and compassion by relating the horrible events that followed the onset of the Revolution.

“La mamma morta”

MADDALENA



Maddalena tells Gérard of the misery she experienced after their home was burned by savage mobs, and her mother died in the flames. She had been alone and abandoned in an empty void, surrounded only by starvation, poverty, hardship and danger. When she fell ill Bersi earned money to keep her alive, paying for her care with her virtue.

Suddenly Maddalena’s face becomes transfigured. She beams with joy as she relates how her sadness was transformed into hope. A divine voice inspired her: “Vivi ancora! Io son la vita!” (“Live still! Find courage to live!”) It was a voice telling her that she was not forsaken, a consolation and comfort that would dry her tears. It was the voice of hope, a divine voice that would descend and make earth a paradise: it was the immortal voice of love; it was the voice of Chénier.

“E dice: ‘Vivi ancora!’”

Andantino
MADDALENA



The story of Maddalena's plight totally overwhelms Gérard, arousing his sympathy, emotion, and compassion, his realization that Maddalena has been rescued by her profound love for Chénier.

The Clerk of the Tribunal places papers before Gérard. He anxiously looks at the list of the accused; it contains Chénier's name. Maddalena's pleas have touched Gérard's soul. He turns to her, overcome by humaneness, and reveals that he would give his life to save Chénier.

The agitated crowd is heard, eager to satisfy their appetite for bloodshed: the voice of the Revolution that devours its own children. The sounds of gunshots resound, indicating that the trial is to begin.

Gérard quickly writes a note to the President of the Tribunal. He begs Maddalena's forgiveness, admitting that he had betrayed Chénier, but that now he will defend his life: "Il tuo perdono e la mia forza! Grazie! Io l'ho perduto, diffenderlo saprò" ("Your forgiveness is my strength! Thank you! I betrayed him, and now I shall save him!")

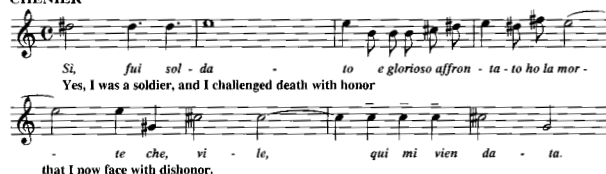
The vengeful, violent, and bloodthirsty crowd rushes into the Tribunal hall, all fighting for seats. Gérard points out the jurors to Maddalena, the presiding judge Dumas, and Fouquier Tinville, the public prosecutor. A door opens, and gendarmes lead the accused prisoners into the hall. Chénier is the last prisoner, but he is unable to see Maddalena.

Silence is ordered. Dumas calls out the names of the accused: Gravier de Vergennes, condemned by the crowd as a traitor; the nun Laval Montmorency, derisively accused by the crowd as an aristocrat; and a mother, Idia Legray.

Then the poet Andrea Chénier is called before the Tribunal. Fouquier Tinville reads the charges, vehemently condemning Chénier for writing against the Revolution's ideals. Chénier refutes Tinville, calling him a liar. The crowd urges Chénier to speak up and defend himself.

"Sì, fui soldato"

CHÉNIER



Chénier defends himself with ferocious passion: "Si fui soldato" ("Yes, I was a soldier.") In his life, Chénier was a soldier who challenged death with honor, but now he faces death with dishonor: his pen was his weapon against hypocrisy and the mindless hatred that distorted French justice; his poetry was his voice that praised his beloved country.

Chénier accepts his destiny, metaphorically describing his life as a ship battling the torrential seas: "My life passes like a white sail; it raises its masts to the sun that bathes

them in gold, and plunges the foaming prow into the deep blue surf.”

“Is my ship driven by destiny, surging toward the white reef of death? Is this my fatal destination? So be it! But I climb the stern and unfurl a flag of victory to the winds, and on that flag is written ‘Freedom!!’”

With renewed passion, Chénier condemns the Tribunal: “That flag flies out of reach of your filthy grasp. I am no traitor! Condemn me! Kill me! But leave me my honor!”

Fouquier Tinville asks to hear the evidence against Chénier. Gérard comes forward and condemns the charges against Chénier as lies, confessing that he wrote them. But Fouquier overrules Gérard. He deems the charges valid, and as Public Prosecutor, accuses Chénier himself. Gérard is rebuked for contempt and offending the court of justice.

Gérard accuses the court of tyranny, using lies to foster their orgy of hatred. He proclaims Chénier a son of the revolution, begging them not to kill France’s poets, but to honor the writer who has used his pen to fight for freedom.

As Gérard and Chénier embrace, Gérard points to Maddalena. Meanwhile, the jury’s chief officer hands the verdict to Dumas, who glances at it quickly, and proclaims: “Morte! (“Guilty!”)

Maddalena sobs in despair and then screams out uncontrollably: “Andrea! Andrea! Riverderlo!” (“Andrea! Andrea! I must see you!”)

ACT IV: The Prison of Saint-Lazare.

Chénier awaits execution. He is seated by a lantern and writes agitatedly, his friend Roucher near him. Schmidt, the jailer, approaches Roucher, who points to Chénier with a sign to be silent; then, Roucher hands money to the jailer.

Chénier stops writing. It is his last poem, and he recites its verses.

“Come un bel di Maggio”

Andantino
CHÉNIER

Come un bel di di mag - gio che con ba - cio di ven - to
Like a beautiful day in May, like a kiss from the wind,

e ca - rez - za di rag - gio si spe - gne in firma - men - to,
like a cress from the sun that ignites the firmament,

Chénier is resigned to his destiny, but yearns for one more inspiration to ennoble his belief in truth, beauty, and honor. In death, his soul will be eternal through the legacy of his poetry.

CHÉNIER

Sia! Strofe, ul-ti-ma De - a! ancor do - na al tuo po - e - ta,
Ah! Poetry, the ultimate god! another gift of the poet,

After Schmidt returns, Roucher embraces Chénier before departing. As Mathieu's voice is heard in the background humming the Marseillaise, Gérard and Maddalena appear at the prison gate. Gérard shows Schmidt Maddalena's visitor's pass, and the jailer admits them.

Maddalena prefers death with Chénier than life without him. She bribes the jailer to substitute her name for that of the condemned young mother, Idia Legray. Schmidt accepts after Gérard offers him jewels and a small purse, and then proceeds to bring Chénier to Maddalena.

Maddalena blesses her destiny: death with her beloved Chénier; "Benedico il destino, benedico la morte." ("Blessed destiny! Blessed death!") Gérard, now totally transformed from a man obsessed with lust and hatred to a man of compassion, movingly exclaims: "Maddalena tu fai della morte la più invidiata sorte!" ("Maddalena you transform death into the most enviable fate!") When Gérard hears Schmidt and Chénier approach, he leaves the prison with Legray.

Chénier recognizes Maddalena and rushes to her, re-inspired to life by her presence. He explodes into impassioned exultation: "Vicino a te s'acqueta l'irrequieta anima mia; tu sei la méta d'ogni desio, d'ogni sogno, d'ogni poesia!" ("Near to you, you calm my troubled soul. You are the ultimate fulfillment of my desires, of all my dreams, and all my poetry!")

"Vicino a te s'acqueta"

Andante molto calmo
CHÉNIER

Vi-ci-no a te s'ac-que-ta l'ir-re-quiè-ta a-ni-ma mia,
Near you, my restless soul is calm,

Maddalena informs Chénier that she has not come to say farewell, but to die with him. With profound emotion, she announces that their love-death will comfort their troubled souls. Overcome with emotion, Chénier ennoble their love, the ultimate fulfillment, the immortal and eternal love that defies death by its transcendence.

As Maddalena explains that she is saving a mother, the dawn light illuminates the courtyard, the sign of morning and the inevitable guillotine. The lovers embrace passionately, ennobling their love as the sublime triumph of the soul, the light of all creation, a blessed love that triumphs over death because it is immortal and eternal.

Drums signal the call to the scaffold. In exultation, the lovers proclaim the triumph of their final destiny: "Viva la morte insiem!" ("Hail our death together!")

"La nostra morte è il trionfo dell'amore!"

Allegro

Maddalena
La nos-tra mor-te
Chénier
Our death
La nos-tra morte è il trionfo dell'amore!
Our death is the triumph of love!

Giordano and Andrea Chénier

The Italian composer, Umberto Giordano (1867-1948), resisted his father's desire that his son become a fencing master, and pursued a music career; in 1882, at the age of 15, despite his parent's objections, he enrolled in the Naples Conservatory.

In 1890, Edoardo Sonzogno, arch-publishing rival of Ricordi, sponsored a one-act opera competition. There were 73 submissions: Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* won decisively, and the sixth-place prize was awarded to *Marina*, composed by the 23-year-old Naples Conservatory student, Umberto Giordano. Sonzogno was ecstatic, believing that in Giordano he had found another composer to join the new "giovane scuola" ("young school"), the Italian verismo (realist) composers who were following the example of Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, a new genre of hyper-emotionalism that strove for naturalism and realism.

Impressed and awed by Giordano's talents, Sonzogno granted his newfound protege a commission to compose a full-length opera. The resulting work became Giordano's forceful, violent, and melodramatic *Mala Vita*, ("The Miserable Life"), which premiered in 1892, its story based on a novella by Salvatore Di Giacomo about the wretched existence of a prostitute, against the background of the sordid squalor of the underclasses of contemporary Naples. *Mala Vita* proved highly successful in Austria and Germany, where it inspired a vogue for operas in Neapolitan settings, but the Italian opera public, not yet accustomed to the stark realism of the new verismo genre, found it shocking and scandalous; five years later Giordano revised the opera, toned down its savage action, and renamed it *Il Voto* ("The Wish"), but it still failed to succeed in Italy.

Nevertheless, Sonzogno's faith in the young composer was steadfast, and following the example of Ricordi's patronage of the young Puccini, provided Giordano with a monthly stipend in lieu of the composition of an opera to celebrate the Mercadante centenary. The resulting opera was *Regina Diaz* (1894), but it was an uninspired and lackluster work that was withdrawn after its second performance.

It seemed that Giordano's star was fading as quickly as it had risen; Sonzogno lost faith in his young protege and canceled his stipend, causing the young composer to subsidize himself by working as a bandmaster and as a fencing instructor. But Giordano's future with Sonzogno was saved by his younger colleague, Alberto Franchetti, a baron who achieved notoriety as both a budding opera composer and an addict of fast cars. Franchetti used his influence on Sonzogno to convince him to give Giordano another chance.

But it was probably the now famous Pietro Mascagni who exerted more influence on Sonzogno on Giordano's behalf than Franchetti. In the early spring of 1896 the city of Florence was proudly inaugurating its new electric tram-line, and at the same time it was dedicating its brief opera season entirely to Mascagni. After Mascagni rode a tram car for its

solemn inaugural ride, he saw Giordano in the crowd. They talked and Mascagni learned of his friend's unfortunate problems with Sonzogno; Mascagni offered to go at once to Milan to plead with Sonzogno. Meanwhile, the flag-bedecked tram began to move, leaving Mascagni outside in conversation with Giordano. After a few hundred yards, the tram's brakes failed and it crashed, causing many injuries and deaths. In effect, Giordano's chance encounter with Mascagni had inadvertently saved the latter's life. Nevertheless, Mascagni proceeded to save Giordano's career, insisting to Sonzogno that his new opera, *Andrea Chénier*, should be commissioned.

The successful playwright and sought-after librettist, Luigi Illica, had written the *Andrea Chénier* libretto for Franchetti, an opera inspired by the original poems of the French poet-patriot, André Marie de Chénier (1762-1794). (Simultaneously, Illica was writing *La Bohème* for Puccini.) Franchetti graciously ceded the libretto to Giordano, who proceeded without hesitation to compose *Andrea Chénier*. The opera premiered in 1896 and received immediate acclaim, its success catapulting Giordano to the front rank among his contemporary verismo composers: Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Catalani, Franchetti, Cilea, Ponchielli, and eventually Puccini.

After *Andrea Chénier*, Giordano returned to a long-cherished project of composing an opera based on Sardou's highly charged melodrama, *Fédora* (1898), a story saturated with betrayal, infidelity and revenge. Like *Chénier*, the opera was well received. Giordano's third triumph was *Siberia* (1903), a rough verismo story involving duels, failed love, and prison escapes.

But suddenly Giordano's fortunes began their decline: *Marcella* (1907), a story of love and renunciation caused by class barriers, failed, as did *Mese Mariano* (1910), whose plot uncannily anticipated Puccini's *Suor Angelica*. He followed with *Madame Sans-Gêne* (1915), a romantic comedy that was far from his verismo style; it was adapted from a Sardou-Moreau play, the bizarre story of a laundress who rises to aristocratic status by presenting Napoleon with an unpaid laundry bill that dates from the time he was a young army lieutenant; the opera failed to arouse critical acclaim. Giordano joined with Franchetti to write the operetta, *Giove a Pompei* (1921), his own contribution having been mostly composed 20 years earlier.

In 1924, Giordano resurrected his career and achieved an unexpected success with the dramatic *La Cena delle Beffe* ("The Feast of Jesters"), a gruesome yet sensational story set in medieval Florence during the reign of Lorenzo the Magnificent. His last work for the stage was the lighthearted moralistic fantasy in one-act, *Il Re* ("The King") (1929). A ballet, *L'Astro Magico*, remained unperformed, while an opera to a libretto by Forzano on the subject of Rasputin never materialized.

In total, Giordano composed 12 operas, but like most of his verismo contemporaries, his fame rests on a singular opera, *Andrea Chénier*, a work whose combination of tempered violence and impassioned melody has established a timeless relevancy and permanence in the opera canon.

Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, a melodrama set during the French revolution, was composed 100 years after the Reign of Terror (1792-1794). The infernal Terror, with its horrific inhumanity, sacrifice, and failed ideals, bore a profound and symbolic relevance to late 19th century Italian intellectuals. Artists of the *fin de siècle* ("end of the century"), and the short-lived verismo genre, portrayed pessimism, malaise, decadence, despair, and world weariness.

The realism of verismo was intended to portray the truth of human existence, a fidelity to natural or real life situations that were represented accurately and without idealization, a dramatic transition from Romanticism's idealism and sentimentality. The genre was inspired by the literary naturalism introduced by Emile Zola in novels whose underlying theme was that the heroes of civilization were "any man walking down the street"; ordinary man was considered more profound than kings and romantic superheroes.

In verismo, common man's true human passions were portrayed as he faced his hostile society and environment. It signaled the end of Romanticism's sentimentalism and its depictions of idealized heroic and legendary characters and subjects. On the verismo stage, forsaken lovers such as Massenet's Werther or Donizetti's Lucia would no longer die of a broken heart or unrequited love, but rather, their deaths would be gruesome; in verismo blood became an important mainstay and stage prop. *Carmen's* (1875) realism (verismé in French) was a groundbreaker that portrayed violent human passions on the stage; Don José's uncontrolled explosion of jealousy leads to his murder of Carmen, a rather shocking reversal of the earlier French dramatic tradition in which killing was required to be an offstage event.

Verismo examined life, saw ugliness, raw instincts and violent passions, and then transformed them into exaggerated melodramas that were hostile and stark. Zola said: "Whoever was conservative enough to believe in something—the soul, God or the hereafter—beat a blushing retreat." Realism on the opera stage portrayed explosive passions involving sex, betrayal, adultery, and murder. In the *Prologue* of Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*, the clown Tonio sums up the essence of the verismo genre; the audience will witness "uno squarcio di vita" ("a slice of real life with real people, real agonies and real tears.")

Verdi's middle period operas, beginning with *Rigoletto* in 1851, and *Il Trovatore* in 1853, may have been the catalyst for verismo: the characterization of the hunchback Rigoletto, and the savagely vengeful gypsy Azucena. But it was Bizet's

Carmen that was the groundbreaker, introducing an unruly, vicious, and callous protagonist who used sex as her weapon to exploit men, and then discarded them like picked flowers. Puccini introduced a murdering, knife-wielding diva in *Tosca*: Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* presented an avenging knife duel—although offstage; and in Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*, a double murder was brought to center stage.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modernity — therefore realism — in music drama was its portrayal of the underbelly of life. That realism eventually evolved into the psychological and surreal expressionistic music dramas of Richard Strauss (*Elektra* and *Salome*), and led to those of Alban Berg (*Wozzeck* and *Lulu*.) Eventually, that modernity would reach the film noire genre: films like *Double Indemnity* and *Laura*, portrayed a hostile, immoral and unethical world from which its protagonists could not escape.

Musically, verismo composers consciously strove for integration of the opera's underlying drama with its music: most operas in the genre possess continuous and seamless text and music, far from the recitative and set-piece structure that was so typical of earlier Italian opera, such as the bel canto genre of the early 19th century. In addition, dialogue and recitative — elements of the action — were intended to be natural, and even conversational. As a result, many verismo scores contain much declamation, the intensity of the “singing speech” commensurate with the dramatic situation. Likewise, in the interplay between characters, there is much interruption of speech that suggests freely mixed conversation, a sense of realism, or naturalness.

Nevertheless, only a handful of those verismo composers achieved first rank, and very few of their operas achieved permanence in the international repertory. It was Pietro Mascagni's dazzling and successful one-act opera *Cavalleria Rusticana* that evoked the descriptive term verismo in Italy. He followed immediately with *L'Amico Fritz* (“Friend Fritz”) (1891), but none of his subsequent operas achieved the success or permanence of *Cavalleria Rusticana*. (Mascagni composed 16 operas.) Of equal success in the genre was Ruggiero Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*, (“The Clowns”), that premiered in 1892. Leoncavallo, like Mascagni, produced more operas, but very few of them have achieved staying power.

Giacomo Puccini — the Italian counterpart of Massenet in France — achieved his first success one year after Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*: *Manon Lescaut* (1893), its story based on the novel by the Abbé Prévost that was dominated by heightened emotions and passions, and a colorful, rich orchestration. Puccini established himself unmistakably as the most important post-Verdian Italian operatic composer, his most popular operas possessing profound musico-dramatic characterizations, mostly of women subjected to pain and sorrow: Mimi in *La Bohème* (1896), and the title characters in *Tosca* (1900) and *Madama Butterfly* (1904).

Although Puccini considered himself part of the naturalistic movement of the “giovane scuola” — what he called the “stile mascagnano” (“Mascagni style”) — his pure verismo operas were few: the violence and swift dramatic action of *Tosca* and the powerful melodrama *Il Tabarro*, (“The Cloak”), the latter a brutal, Grand Guignol type of story involving infidelity, revenge, and murder, from his trio of one-act operas, *Il Trittico* (“The Triptych”), composed in 1918.

Other Italian verismo operas of the late 19th century and early 20th that followed the brash originality of the young Mascagni and Leoncavallo included Alfredo Catalani’s *La Wally* (1892), Francesco Cilea’s *Adriana Lecouvreur* (1902), and of course, Umberto Giordano’s *Andrea Chénier* (1896) and *Fedora* (1898).

The French Revolution was a major transition in Western history, the embodiment of the ideals of the optimistic 18th century Enlightenment and the Age of Reason: Rousseau’s idealistic vision of a world of freedom, civility and egalitarian progress that would signal the end of autocratic tyranny, oppression, and economic and social injustices.

But the elevated hopes, dreams, and humanitarian ideals of the French Revolution became an illusion, shattered by the horrifying slaughters perpetrated during the Reign of Terror (1792-1794). The Terror, like the Holocaust in the 20th century, became a bloodbath that shook the very foundations of humanity; if anything, its horrifying evil invoked man’s deliberate betrayal of his highest nature and ideals.

Idealists became morally outraged. The German Romanticist, Friedrich Schiller, who had lauded Enlightenment idealism and the Revolution in his exultant “Ode to Joy” (1785), which Beethoven immortalized in the Chorale of his Ninth Symphony, had witnessed the horror of the Terror and eventually concluded that the new century had “begun with murder’s cry.” Optimism transformed into pessimism as many concluded that the drama of human history had approached doomsday, and as a result, civilization was on the verge of vanishing completely. The Revolution and Terror had ushered in a horrifying new era of crimes in which men committed atrocities out of love not of evil but of virtue. Like Goethe’s *Faust*, who represented two souls in one breast, man had become simultaneously great and wretched.

By 1893, the French Revolution had progressed into chaos and anarchy. The entire political system had decayed: there were threatening factions from within demanding federalism, a civil war in the northwest, and anti-French coalitions of European powers at the country’s frontiers.

Robespierre mobilized France's resources to resolve the anarchy that had destroyed the ideals of the revolution, noting that France needed "une volonté une" ("one single will") to rescue itself. He proceeded to create the essential organs of revolutionary government to guarantee order, and in the process, provided himself with authoritarian and dictatorial powers. On July 27, 1793, Robespierre took the prominent seat on the newly-formed Committee of Public Safety. His actions were synonymous and inseparable from those of the government, and he immediately established a revolutionary militia for use against counterrevolutionaries, radicals, and demonstrators. He exercised virtual dictatorial control over the judicial system, suspending a suspect's right to public trial and legal assistance, and leaving juries only a choice between acquittal and death.

In effect, Robespierre became the primary architect of the Reign of Terror, the instrument of order and justice that was enforced by the guillotine. He intensified the Terror in order to force mass conscriptions, control the civil war, and exercise economic control. Harsh measures were taken against those suspected of being enemies of the Revolution, such as nobles, priests, and hoarders: in Paris, a wave of executions was instituted, and in the provinces representatives were sent on missions of surveillance, which became local terror. The lower classes demanded price controls that provoked harsh government measures to prosecute food hoarders. Violent action was taken against militants who demanded more radical measures to establish order: followers of Jacques Hébert, who advocated de-Christianization, were denounced and executed, as well as the Indulgents, followers of Georges Danton who threatened the government by attacking the Committee's policies; they wanted to halt the increasing violence of the Terror. During the Terror, at least 300,000 suspects were arrested: 17,000 were officially executed, and many died in prison, without trial.

In Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, Robespierre's tyranny represents the counterforce to Chénier's idealism. The dictator-tyrant appears momentarily in Act II to receive praises from the crowd, and in Act III, he is the shadow-power of the Tribunal that condemns Chénier to the guillotine.

André Marie de Chénier (1762-1794) was a true historical personage: a poet, ardent patriot, and an idealistic advocate of the ideals of the French Revolution. But eventually his dreams became illusions, and he became a victim of the Revolution's Reign of Terror.

Chénier was born in Constantinople — present day Istanbul — where his father held a post equivalent to that of a French Consul. By the age of 20, the young Chénier had become a Greek scholar and translator of the classics, no doubt an inspiration from his Greek mother. In 1772, at the

age of 10, his family moved back to France where he continued his studies of the classics at the Collège de Navarre in Paris. After leaving school, he devoted time to quiet study and travel. Later, he became a cadet in the French army, but his service lasted only a few months because he lacked serious military ambitions. Nevertheless, during that short military career he met the renowned Greek scholar Phillippe Brunck (1729-1803), whose *Greek Anthology* became the inspiration for many of Chénier's later poems. For a short period Chénier became a secretary at the French Embassy in London, but homesickness ended any possibilities of a diplomatic career.

In 1789 the Bastille was stormed, officially beginning the French Revolution. Chénier was an early supporter, who welcomed the Revolution as necessary for France: he devoted himself to political writing, ardently supporting the Enlightenment ideals of human dignity, equality and fraternity as the new fabric of French life.

Chénier eventually served on the First Republic's Committee of Public Instruction, the group that advocated and incepted universal, or free public education as the basic means for enhancing national power and promoting social progress and equality.

Chénier penned his idealistic vision of the Revolution's goals:

"The French nation, oppressed and degraded during many centuries by the most insolent despotism, has finally awakened to a consciousness of rights and of the power to which its destinies summon it. It wishes its regeneration to be complete, in order that its years of liberty and glory may have more significance than it has had in its years of slavery and humiliation in the history of kings."

In 1792, the First Republic was established and Chénier faced the paradox of many early supporters of the Revolution: he was a moderate who believed that the ideals and goals of the Revolution had been achieved with the establishment of the Republic; the Revolution's final goal would be to consolidate its principles through the rule of law. However, others felt that the Republic merely symbolized the beginning of the Revolution. In 1792, Chénier joined groups who advocated acquittal of Louis XVI after the king was tried as a traitor and condemned to the guillotine. The political conflict that arose led to internal chaos and virtual anarchy, a disorder that Robespierre resolved by orchestrating the Reign of Terror during the years 1792 through 1794.

Chénier condemned the Revolution's excesses and deplored violence. Ultimately, he became an outspoken critic of the Terror, citing the horror in which Frenchmen were killing Frenchmen. He wrote many articles in *Le Moniteur* against the Jacobin party, many of which attacked their leaders by name, and ultimately contributed to his downfall: in Chénier's *Hymne sur l'entrée triomphale des Suisses*

révoltés, he lodged a protest against the acquittal of a military regiment that had mutinied.

Chénier's counterrevolutionary political sentiments were inflamed after the assassination of Jean-Paul Marat (1743-1793). Chénier's *Ode à Marie-Anne-Charlotte Corday*, the Girondist sympathizer who murdered Marat in his bathtub, was considered political blasphemy. In 1793, when moderation was defeated, Chénier retired from politics and devoted himself totally to writing poetry.

But on March 7, 1794, Chénier was arrested by the Reign of Terror for his former antagonistic politics and placed in the St. Lazare Prison, joining a brilliant society of incarcerated poets and artists. He spent 141 days in prison, where he met Anne Françoise-Aimée de Franquetot de Coigny, a condemned aristocrat who became his muse: he dedicated *Iambes* to her.

Chénier was brought before the Tribunal on July 7, 1794 and convicted on spurious charges of conspiracy. He was guillotined as an enemy of the Revolution in the Place de l'Execution, now the Place de la Concorde. On his way to the guillotine, he handed de Coigny his final poem, *La Jeune Captive* ("The Young Captive"), a heartbreaking reflection of the condemned poet's despair.

Ironically, 19 days after his execution, the Reign of Terror ended, Robespierre himself becoming one of its final victims. The epilogue to that era was that Napoleon arose from the ashes of the chaos and established the Consulate: the ideals of the Revolution inevitably ended in a preposterous military despotism and the loss of the very liberties that the Revolution had sought to gain.

Luigi Illica (1857-1919) was one of the most sought after playwrights and librettists of the late 19th century. Among his over 80 libretti are Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*. He wrote the libretto for Giordano's *Andrea Chénier* simultaneously while writing *La Bohème* for Puccini.

During the last decade of the 19th century, Italy was experiencing political and economic crises. There was much agitation and unrest: the Socialist Party that had been agitating for change was outlawed a few years earlier, causing rioting to erupt in the larger cities, and in 1900, the king was assassinated.

The Risorgimento (1860) fulfilled Italy's dream of liberation from foreign rule (Austria and France), heralding the unification of the country, and a democratic political system. But by the end of the century, none of those lofty dreams of democracy and political stability had been achieved. Italy lacked the resources for rapid social and economic development; a "second Rome" did not emerge. The veneer of political union could not disguise the reality of a divided country: in the south, from Naples through Sicily, the social and economic structure was virtually medieval,

an illiterate peasantry living in grinding poverty under primitive feudal institutions that lacked the infrastructure to execute law and order; the only effective escape from squalor was emigration. But in contrast, the north thrived, developing industrially and progressing economically.

During the first generation after unification, moderate liberals of the north led the government, upper and middle class representatives who distrusted democracy. In the 1870s and 1880s liberal factions of the upper middle-class oligarchy emerged, maintaining political stability by developing personal cliques and petty interest groups that they held together with pork-barrel arrangements; in the end, every opposing faction in Italy was compromised in one way or another through political favors.

The slow expansion of the nation's economy caused continuing internal discontent; in the 1890s there were peasant revolts, and disorders were provoked by anarchists and disenchanted factions. A host of political ideologies and movements emerged, each with its own agenda to establish order, some advocating a sinister new form of supernationalism that demanded more aggressive government action. Ultimately, political and social unrest was indeed repressed by energetic police action by the government. However, the political chaos set the stage for authoritarianism and fascism: complete control of intellectual and political thought, militarism, an irrational scorn for the rule of law and ethics, discipline and total devotion to duty, and the supreme sovereignty of the nation as an absolute entity. The Italian slogan "to believe, to obey, to combat," became emerging fascism's antithesis to the French Revolution's "liberty, equality, fraternity."

Thus, as Illica penned his libretto for *Andrea Chénier*, Italy's political and social climate was in chaos, and the country seemed to be evolving toward a despotism and tyranny that evoked memories of Robespierre's Reign of Terror. The engine that drives Illica's fictionalized Chénier story portrays the horror of the Reign of Terror, a dramatization of the betrayal of human ideals. It was no doubt Illica's intention to recall the Terror and provide a despairing forecast and warning to his Italian compatriots; beware of the ominous clouds that were gathering on their own political horizon, because the dark history of the French Revolution's Reign of Terror could very well repeat itself in Italy.

Essentially, the middle acts of *Andrea Chénier* portray the extreme horror of the Terror in action, a panorama of brutal revenge, death, hostility, fanaticism, and injustice. And it is that savage evil and inhumanity portrayed in *Andrea Chénier* that places it in the verismo genre: a work composed during the late 19th century when the genre was flowering, but a story whose roots are separated by one hundred years of history.

The political climate of late 19th century Italy was sensitive, insecure, and vacillating; it was heroic — if not

dangerous—to express outrage and criticism of its chaotic condition. The publisher Sonzogno vacillated about producing *Andrea Chénier*, deeming the story’s underlying fanaticism and terror too risky to portray during those volatile times: in particular, the rebellion of peasants led by Gérard at the conclusion of Act I. (In 1898, Giordano’s *Fedora* evoked similar fears, its premiere coinciding with the assassination of Empress Elisabeth of Austria; it was era in which regicide and nihilism were virtually everyday events.)

Nevertheless, Illica romanticized Chénier’s tragic fate, concluding the melodrama in a love-death of almost Wagnerian proportions. But Illica’s libretto is saturated with profound humanistic ideals: *Andrea Chénier* is an opera about noble ideas. Illica heroically expresses Chénier’s profound idealism by adapting the historical Chénier’s poetry, particularly his writing in prison just before his execution. Those heroic signature arias, “Un di all’azzuro spazio,” “Si fui soldato” and “Come un bel dì di maggio,” each expresses the heroic agony of the poet, his courage against insurmountable villainy and injustice.

The central characters in the opera are the idealistic poet Chénier, the despairing ex-aristocrat Maddalena de Coigny, and the vengeful ex-servant turned revolutionary, Carlo Gérard. Essentially, the story portrays the love of Chénier and Maddalena set against reversals of fortune caused by the transitions set into motion by the Revolution. But Illica peoples the cast with a host of clearly defined cameo characterizations, each serving to portray human despair in the struggle to survive during the heightened period of the Terror: the devoted mulatto maid Bersi who sacrifices her virtue for her former aristocratic mistress; the Incredible who spies unconscionably for the Revolution; the old and blind Madelon who sacrifices her only grandson to the Revolution; Mathieu who becomes confounded by his inability to comprehend the reasons for the transformation of idealistic dreams into anarchy and chaos; and the jailer Schmidt, who is ready and willing to sacrifice his ideals for money. The crowds are not an ancient Greek chorus commenting on events, but rather a bloodthirsty and avenging participant in the horror of the Reign of Terror; they cheer for those victims heading to the guillotine in Act II, and they crave death by the guillotine during the Act III Tribunal scene.

Giordano’s music dutifully captures the heightened passions of the Revolution. Like his verismo contemporaries striving for realism, he was particularly skilful in integrating elements of local and historical color into his music scores: *Mala Vita* captures Neapolitan ambience through dance rhythms; *Siberia* recalls its setting through Russian folk music. In *Andrea Chénier*, Giordano ingeniously captures the spirit of the Revolution through subtle though realistic musical touches: in Act II the “Ah, ça ira” accompanies the cart of prisoners headed for the

guillotine; in Act III, the “Carmagnole” is heard from the crowd outside as Mathieu sweeps the Tribunal hall; and in Act IV, “La marseillaise” is hummed by Mathieu during the interval between Chénier’s farewell aria, “Come un bel di di maggio,” and the arrival of Gérard and Maddalena into the prison.

Certainly the aristocratic ambience of the first act ball at the Chateau de Coigny provides a magnificent contrast to the subsequent act’s portrayal of the Revolution in progress: the first act frames the drama by brilliantly evoking pre-Bastille aristocratic society; there is a capriciousness and frivolity in the music of the Pastoral and Gavotte that emphasizes the indulgences of the ancien régime, a world of powdered wigs and corseted women.

Giordano uses his musical language to provide profound atmospheric contrasts. The first act’s aristocratic ambience contrasts powerfully with Gérard’s music: his emotional explosion of outrage as he addresses the sofa before the ball, a metaphor for horrible servitude; and later in the act, his denunciation of the aristocracy as he leads the peasants in revolt. But after the first act concludes with the Gavotte, the ancien régime has disappeared, and the action of the melodrama transforms to the verismo world, a fast and furious depiction of life during the Reign of Terror that is saturated with brutal human cruelty and injustice.

Two musical leitmotifs dominate Giordano’s score: the theme from Chénier’s first act “Improvviso,” “Non conoscete amor,” which Maddalena repeats during the second act recognition scene, and the music of “hope” and love from Maddalena’s third act aria, “La mamma morta,” recalled quite subtly in the final act as Maddalena blesses her destiny: her love-death.

Giordano poured a wealth of passion into *Andrea Chénier*, but the greatness of the opera is its magnificent blend of poetry with lyrical passion.

Andrea Chénier is a rescue opera, but it is a failed rescue that is unlike Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, in which the heroine joins the hero in a death cell and succeeds in freeing him. In *Andrea Chénier*, the lovers unite, but both hero and heroine die as martyrs for the betrayed ideals of the French Revolution.

The opera story focuses on the reversal of fortunes of each of its principal characters that are the results of transitions caused by the French Revolution, but the soul of the opera — both musically and intellectually — is the romantic and idealistic poet, Andrea Chénier. Chénier’s exalted nobility evolves from his outspoken criticism of the Revolution, and in particular, the Reign of Terror, an hypocrisy and betrayal of ideals that ultimately led to his execution by the distorted injustice of the very Reign of Terror he condemned. His noble humanistic ideals are earnestly expressed in his first act aria, the “Improvviso,” “Un di

all'azzurro spazio," the text abounding with poetic metaphors that are dramatized by a combination of sublime lyrical explosions and declamatory harangues, in which the idealistic poet challenges aristocratic hypocrisy and makes a fervent plea for human compassion. But this is an opera in which politics and love are united: during the aria, Chénier turns to the young Maddalena, recognizes her sensitivity to his idealistic ardor and proclaims what will become the romantic leitmotif of the opera: "Non conoscete amor!" ("You do not understand love!") And then the poet proceeds to exalt love — the power of poetry — the divine gift of human existence: "Amor divino dono!"

All of Giordano's music for the idealistic young Andrea Chénier is endowed with powerful passions: his impetuous yearning for love in Act II, "Bella ideale divina come la poesia,"; the Act III defense of his honor, "Si fui soldato"; and in Act IV, "Come un bel di di maggio," his final capitulation to destiny while in prison awaiting the guillotine.

Musically, Chénier is a dramatic tenor role that possesses powerful passion and heroism; it requires immense vocal bravado, tremendous musical authority, resolution, assertiveness, and solidity. Historically, the role has been cherished by great tenors: it was Gigli's favorite tenor role, and in the 1950s it became one of Mario Del Monaco's signature roles. In contemporary times, it has been sung by Franco Corelli, Carlo Bergonzi, and today, each of the three tenors, Plácido Domingo, Luciano Pavarotti, and José Carreras.

Although Andrea Chénier is the title character of the opera, Carlo Gérard is its hero, the former de Coigny servant who becomes an impassioned revolutionary, who seethes with revenge against his former masters, and becomes a leader of the Revolution who participates in the duplicity and injustices of the Terror. But by the end of the tragedy, Gérard's soul transforms into nobility: his true humanity transcends the hypocrisy of the Revolution.

At the very beginning of the first act, Gérard speaks of the impoverished underclasses of society, which provides a prelude to the class warfare that is about to erupt in the Revolution. He speaks like Beaumarchais's Figaro, cursing his destiny and the accident of his birth, his words, a manifesto of rebellion, in which he deplores the victims of poverty and social injustices, and scornfully condemns the wealthy aristocracy in a malicious and explosive tirade of hatred; his condemnation of his masters is a forecast of the revenge that was underlying so much of the bloodshed that occurred during the Reign of Terror.

Bitterly, Gérard observes his trembling old father who has sacrificed his life and soul in servitude. But the more horrendous crime is that his father perpetuated that suffering to his own sons. In outrage, Gérard explodes in contempt, cursing both his fate and the aristocracy he serves: "T'odio

casa dorata!” (“I hate you gilded house! You are the image of a world of vanity and powder. Pretty dandies in silk and lace who step quickly to the merry gavottes and minuets.”)

Gérard predicts the forthcoming Revolution, confident that this great historical transformation of society will fulfill its enlightened promises and reverse human injustices. He again addresses his masters scornfully: “Fissa è la vostra sorte!” (“Your fate is sealed! You are an ugly and corrupted race of dandies and felons. I, a son of servants, and a servant in livery shall be your judge in livery. I warn you”); “È l’ora della morte!” (“The hour of your death approaches!”) Indignantly and proudly, he concludes: “Today you are the master, tomorrow we master you.”

In Act III, Gérard has experienced his epiphany and now searches for truth: his aria, “Nemico della patria,” is perhaps the dramatic centerpiece of the entire opera, Gérard’s moment of profound introspection, in which he communicates with his conscience and realizes that all he has achieved is that he has become a slave who recycles hatred and tyranny. He is a survivor, caught in the satanic waves of the Revolution; he has become transformed into lechery and sacrificed his morality, pride and noble convictions.

Revenge was the engine that drove Gérard’s tortured soul. He lusts for Maddalena de Coigny, the aristocrat he served, but who was unattainable. As a leader of the Revolution, he has sent the secret police to find her (the spy, the Incredible); power now belongs to the formerly powerless. Maddalena indeed comes to Gérard and confronts him with an appeal to save her beloved Chénier. Gérard, exulting in his triumph, explodes into a Scarpia-like assault on Maddalena. But Maddalena, the intended victim, becomes the victor after Gérard realizes the intensity of her love for Chénier; he is overcome by profound compassion. Gérard’s inner soul transforms from lechery, and he heroically vows to use all of his powers to save Chénier from the guillotine, the man he earlier falsely accused. And finally, it is in Act IV, when Gérard delivers Maddalena to Chénier in prison, that he expresses the truth of his noble transformation: “Ah Maddalena tu fai della morte la più invidiata sorte” (“Maddalena, you make death a more inviting fate.”)

In Act I, Maddalena de Coigny is seen as a young aristocrat rebelling against society’s conventions: before the ball she refutes the ugly fashions she must wear. But in Act II, five years later, after the aristocracy’s fortunes were overturned by the Revolution, the ex-aristocrat has become a pathetic victim of the Revolution, fearing for her life, and seeking the assistance of Andrea Chénier.

Giordano endowed *Andrea Chénier* with two magnificent love duets. In the finale of Act II, Maddalena and Chénier fall in love: “Ora soave,” a powerful testament to Giordano’s gift for sensuous lyricism. But the final duet of *Andrea Chénier* is perhaps the most sublime moment of the opera, a duet saturated with genuine passions, whose

bravado never fails to electrify and arouse its audience to a frenzy.

As Chénier and Maddalena await the guillotine, they celebrate the consummation of their love, a transcendent destiny of death in which their love will become eternal and immortal. Death has become the supreme triumph of their love, their ultimate glory: “Infinita l’amore!” (“Eternal love!”), and finally, “Viva la morte insiem!” (“Long live love together!”)

Chénier and Maddalena were victims of the barbarism that had transformed the idealism of the French Revolution into the inhuman savagery of the Reign of Terror, but in their eternal love, they became the victors.

*A*ndrea Chénier is arguably Giordano’s singular masterpiece, an opera about powerful human ideals and aspirations, that is expressed with music possessing potent lyricism and romantic passion, the reason for its everlasting appeal to audiences for over a century.

Giordano endowed Illica’s poetically inspired text with music that never fails to arouse emotion or raise the temperature of its audience. Words communicate and provoke thought; music evokes feeling and emotion. In *Andrea Chénier*, composer and librettist succeed in providing sublime musical theater: a libretto that is saturated with nobility, and music that dutifully dramatizes its idealistic soul.