Welcome to Manon! During the performances of our first opera, I was struck by how very personal our experience is at Opera in the Heights. It’s like having your very own opera company, close to you physically and emotionally; where you can really see and feel everything that’s going on. It’s a wonderful experience, almost unique in opera. I’m sure you’ll share this very feeling during Manon with your Oh! family and friends.

Each of us is involved with Opera in the Heights! to a different degree and in different ways. I’d like to invite you to enhance your enjoyment of Oh! Join the guild, usher and come to the pot-luck dinner with singers and chorus; you’ll get to know their personal stories. Come to the free dress rehearsals, hear the other cast sing and watch opera being made; win a walk-on role, tweet the opera or take photos and share them on our flickr group. Come to the Wednesday night reception and talk at Houston Piano Company to meet new opera friends and learn more about the opera you are about to see. Come to the Thursday night pre-opera reception at Karen Derr Realty Company; enjoy a glass of wine and chat with fellow fans. Join the Social Club for added opportunities to socialize with great friends who share your passion for opera. House a singer and have a player on the field to root for. Give your time, or your talent, or your treasure; for in any event the rewards are many-fold. Join the board and help steer this little-company-that-can ever onward. These wonderful things happen because Oh! has inspired you and people like you to make them happen. Call us; we’d love to help you personalize your involvement.

Jim and Rosalie Bates, friends of the founder, have done many of these activities; their involvement goes back to the beginning. Rosalie has contributed her time and talent as a member of the Guild and as its president and as a member of the Board as its secretary and so much more. I thank them deeply as underwriters of this production of Manon, and for everything they have so generously given.

Bill Haase
Managing Director
Chairman, Board of Directors
Manon
Music by Jules Massenet
Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille

*THIS PRODUCTION IS SPONSORED BY JAMES R. AND ROSALIE A. BATES
*November 6, 2009 performance adopted by Opera in the Heights Guild
*November 7, 2009 performance adopted by Barbra and Joseph Munisteri
and honors Joan Carlson, “a tireless volunteer for Oh!”

Artistic Director and Conductor
William M. Weibel
Cullen Conducting Chair

Stage Director
Adam Ganderson

PRODUCTION TEAM

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Stage Hand - Brian Eley
Chorus Master - Calvin Fuller
Stage Director/Stage Manager - Adam Ganderson
Lightboard Operator - Maria Garmendia

Set Painter/Builder - Katie Jackson
Costume Designer - Dena Scheh
Lighting Designer - Kevin Taylor
Repetiteur - Teruhiko Toda
Make-up Artist - Stacey Weber

CHORUS

Emerald - Nov 5, 7, and 13
Ruby - Nov 6, 12, and 14

Manon - Jacqueline Noparstak (EMERALD)
Des Grieux - Timothy Birt (EMERALD)
Manon - Jacqueline Thompson (RUBY)
Des Grieux - Luke Grooms (RUBY)
Lescaut - Yoonsang Lee*
Guillot - George Williams*
De Brétigny - Keir Murray*
Cont’ Des Grieux - Daymon Passmore*
Poussette - Stacey Weber*
Javotte - Rachel Ross*
Rosette - Heather Scanio*
Innkeeper - Michael Moses*
Guardsman (1) - Scott Travis*
Guardsman (2) - Kenneth Alumbaugh*
Maid (Act II) - Rita Minter*

*denotes artist sings in all 6 performances

CAST

Emerald - Jacqueline Noparstak
Ruby - Luke Grooms

Manon - Jacqueline Thompson*
Des Grieux - Daymon Passmore*
Cont’ Des Grieux - Daymon Passmore*

CHORUS

Kenneth Alumbaugh
Patricia Bernstein
Traci Davis
Ekanem Ebinne
Jada Edison
Martha Elliott - Adopted by Karen T. Susman

Michael Leone - Adopted by Irene Bourke and Joseph Waiter
Matt Maschek
Jennifer Mergele
Michael Moses
Johnny Nichols
Jayna Parker
Taylor Rawley
Jordan Rector
Tamara Tisdale - Adopted by Denise and Kinjo Yonemoto
Scott Travis - Adopted by Mark Rosenberg and Ben Samuels
There will be two 10 minute intermissions after Act II and after Act III. The performance should run about 3 ½ hours and end at 11:00 P.M.

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Those who are housing our artists:

Peg and Jack Anderson, Elaine Massey and David Himel, Eric Arbiter, Anne Sloan, David Douglas and Lamar Mathews, Trudy Nelson, Betty Beem, Sharon Davis and Bill Morrison

Our volunteers who usher, operate the boutique, and prepare and serve the intermission refreshments.

John Burghduff for programming and running the titles and his assistant, Howard Marmell.

Thu Nhi D. Barrus for helping with French pronunciation.

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Matt Mullins and John Langman at Houston Gym for helping our out of town artists stay fit and healthy.

Jo Lyday, Davis Tucker, and Eric Arbiter for providing transportation for the artists.

Our flickr group members for the fantastic pictures they take and share with us at flickr.com/groups/operaintheheights

Costs of this production are partially funded by donations from:

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MANON

ACT I: France, 1721. In the courtyard of an inn at Amiens, a crowd awaits arrival of the coach. Guillot, an elderly roué, and his wealthy friend Brétigny, who have ordered dinner for three actresses of easy virtue, Poussette, Javotte and Rosette. As they retire to a room, a young officer, Lescaut, comes to meet his cousin Manon, who is on her way to a convent. The coach soon arrives and with it Manon, who excitedly tells Lescaut about her first trip away from home. While he looks after her luggage, Guillot, calling for more wine, notices the pretty girl and flirts with her, but she only laughs at the elderly man’s advances. Lescaut returns, and before joining friends at a gaming table warns Manon about talking to strangers. To herself, she wistfully compares her own bland future with the pleasure-filled life of Guillot and his glamorous companions. The Chevalier Des Grieux arrives at the inn and, on seeing Manon, falls in love with her. Seizing this opportunity to escape the convent, Manon suggests that they run off to Paris in Guillot’s coach. The tipsy old bon vivant, who had intended to abduct Manon himself, stumbles from the inn just in time to hurl curses after the escaping lovers.

ACT II: In their Paris apartment, Manon and Des Grieux read a letter he has written to his father in which he describes his sweetheart and asks permission to marry her. When Des Grieux notices a bouquet of flowers Brétigny has sent, Manon tells a lie to allay his suspicions of her loyalty. Lescaut and Brétigny arrive, the former to demand that Des Grieux marry Manon, the latter to tell the girl that Des Grieux will soon be kidnapped by his irate father. The visitors depart, and Des Grieux goes off to send his letter. Left alone, Manon is unable to resist the temptation of luxury offered her by Brétigny and bids a poignant farewell to the life she has shared with Des Grieux. The young man returns, relating an idyllic vision of their future life together, but officers suddenly force their way into the room and abduct him.

ACT III: A holiday crowd fills a park at the Cours-la-Reine, where Poussette, Javotte and Rosette have eluded Guillot. Manon, surrounded by wealthy admirers, preens herself and sings a gavotte in praise of youth and pleasure. When Des Grieux’ father, the Count, speaks with Brétigny, Manon overhears their conversation and learns that Des Grieux is about to take holy orders at the Church of St. Sulpice. She herself speaks to the Count and is piqued to hear that her former lover has grown cold to her charms. Manon rushes to St. Sulpice.

In the sacristy at St. Sulpice, some women describe the eloquence of the new Abbé. Skeptical of his son’s new virtue, the Count tries to persuade Des Grieux to abandon the church and marry a suitable girl. After the father leaves, Des Grieux prays for the strength to resist the memory of Manon. However, Manon arrives, breaks his resolve with her ardor, and persuades him to run away with her.

ACT IV: The Hôtel de Transylvanie, a notorious gambling house, is crowded with merrymakers, including Lescaut, Guillot and the three actresses. When Des Grieux arrives with Manon, she suggests that he recoup their sagging fortunes at the faro table. As the young man plays cards with Guillot, Manon and the actresses sing in praise of living for the moment. Guillot, losing every hand, accuses Des Grieux of cheating and goes off to summon the police; the authorities soon arrive and with them the Count Des Grieux, who rebukes his son but promises him that his arrest will be only temporary. Manon swoons as he is taken away.

ACT V: Manon is to be deported to Louisiana on charges of immorality. On the road to Le Havre, where she must pass, Des Grieux and Lescaut bribe the guards to release her. Manon, in the last stages of consumption, falls exhausted in her lover’s arms. Des Grieux though despairing, comforts her as, murmuring of their lost happiness, she dies.

~ William M. Weibel
PRODUCTION TEAM

Keith Chapman
Assistant Artistic Director
(M Mus in Piano, Rice)
With Oh! Since 1999.
Music director theatrical productions Houston, Galveston, Texas City, and Dallas
Recitalist, accompanist vocal department HSPVA
Music Librarian, Rice

Calvin Fuller
Chorus Master
With Oh! since 2004.
Organist & choirmaster at St. James Episcopal church, adjunct professor at TSU, and Ebony Opera chorus master.

Adam Ganderson
Stage Director / Stage Manager
(BS Mech Eng, MIT; MFA Stage Management, Yale School of Drama)
Oh!: Light Board Operator / Stage Manager, Il Tabarro / Pagliacci
Recent: Stage Manager: Chicago Opera Theater, Ash Lawn Opera, Syracuse Stage, Yale Repertory Theater, and Dallas Theater Center

Katie Jackson
Set Builder/ Set Painter
An accomplished painter whose artistry has been seen for three seasons at Oh! as well as on the stages of Bobbindoctrin Puppet Theatre & Catastrophic Theater.

Dena Scheh
Costume Designer
Oh! Falstaff
Macbeth
Don Pasquale
Madama Butterfly
Others
Designs Costumes for numerous opera and theater companies

Winifred Sowell
Props Mistress
Oh! Il Tabarro / Pagliacci
Recent: Prop Designer, The Wiz, Ensemble Theater
Set Designer, The Man Who Saved New Orleans, Ensemble Theater
Set Designer and Props Designer at the Ensemble Theater

Kevin Taylor
Lighting Designer
(Graduate Diploma in Piano Accompaniment, Bachelor of Music, Tokyo College of Music)
Recent: Assistant Conductor, National Theater Tokyo Repetiteur, Das Verralene Meer, Henze (World Premier), RAI Torino Symphony Orchestra Conductor, L’elisir d’amore, Mira Mare, Japan

William Weibel
Artistic Director, Conductor
With Oh! Since 1999
A Fulbright Scholar and former Metropolitan Opera conductor with a world of opera experience

Teruhiko Toda
Repetiteur
(Graduate Diploma in Piano Accompaniment, Bachelor of Music, Tokyo College of Music)
Recent: Assistant Conductor, National Theater Tokyo Repetiteur, Das Verralene Meer, Henze (World Premier), RAI Torino Symphony Orchestra Conductor, L’elisir d’amore, Mira Mare, Japan
Oh!
2011 Nadir, The Pearl Fishers
Recent:
Duke, Rigoletto,
South Texas Lyric Opera
Remendado, Carmen
San Antonio Opera
Almaviva, Il Barbiere di Siviglia
Lakeland Opera Theater

Timothy Birt
Tenor
Des Grieux (Oh! debut)

Keir Murray
Baritone
De Bretigny

Oh!:
2010 Nadir, The Pearl Fishers
Recent:
Gambler #1 (cover), Metropolitan Opera
Dwight/God, Jerry Springer: the Opera, Carnegie Hall-New York
Fante, I Due Foscari, Opera Orchestra of New York-
Carnegie Hall
Elvino, La Sonnambula, Opera Orchestra of New York-
Young Artist performance

Luke Grooms
Tenor
Des Grieux (Oh! and role debut)

Jacqueline Noparstak
Soprano
Manon

Oh!:
2006, Masetto Don Giovanni
2007, Morales Carmen
2008, Shapeless Madama Butterfly
2010, Marcello La Boheme
Recent:
Escaramillo Carmen Sao Paulo, Brazil
Belcore L’elisir d’amore Green Mountain Opera Festival
Yamadori Madama Butterfly St. Barts Music Festival

Yoonsang Lee
Baritone
Lescaut

Daymon Passmore
Bass
Comte des Grieux (Oh! debut)

Oh!:
2008, Lady in Waiting, Macbeth

Rachael Ross
Soprano
Javotte

Oh!:
2009 Soprano Lover, Il Tabarro
Chorus member 6 Productions
Recent:
Gianetta, L’Elisir D’amore, Italian Operatic Experience
CAST

Heather Scanio
Mezzo Soprano
Rosette (Oh! and role debut)

Jacqueline Milena Thompson
Soprano
Manon (Role Debut)

Stage name: Stacey Weber
Soprano
Pousette (Oh! Debut)

Stage Name: George Williams
Tenor
Guillot

Kenneth Alumbaugh
Tenor
2nd production

Traci Davis
Soprano
18th production

Patricia Bernstein
Mezzo & Soprano
6th production

Ekanem Ebinne
Alto
Oh! Debut

Recent:
2010 - Nicklausse, The Tales of Hoffmann
Recent:
2010 Leïla, The Pearl Fishers
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Mezzo-Soprano
21st production

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2nd production

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Baritone
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Tenor
7th production

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Bass
6th production

Tamara Tisdale
Soprano
10th production

Jennifer Mergele
Mezzo-Soprano
Oh! Debut

Scott Travis
Tenor
5th production
THE POPULAR MASSENET

Manon, composed in 1882, is a distinctly French tale of a woman seduced and eventually undone by her weakness for life in the fast lane as practiced in 18th-century Paris. It is based on Abbé Prevost's 1731 cautionary novel, “Manon Lescaut.” The novel is about a wise man who relates the story of the Chevalier des Grieux and Manon, as a warning to his young, aristocratic student. In the novel, Manon does not exist; she is an idea. The moral of Prevost's tale was: Upper-class men should not get involved with slutty, lower class girls. Of course, Massenet could not do that in the opera. He made both characters much more sympathetic. In the novel, des Grieux and Manon cheat at cards, in the opera they do not. In the novel, des Grieux kills someone and then makes some ridiculous excuse. In the opera, he does not. Some have been quoted as referring to Manon's wholehearted innocence. I would add "She is tender, superficial and quite brainless. What more could a sensible man want?" It's an amusing description, right on the money as far as it goes. But "wholehearted innocence"? Let's not overlook this sixteen-year-old girl's greedy streak, or the calculating cold blooded way with which she agrees to let her lover be abducted so she can move on to a courtesan's life of luxury. Tougher, more determined, with more strings to her bow than just another bimbo. Massenet and his librettists, Meilhac and Gille, collaborated 150 years after Prevost wrote his novel. They were more inclined to portray their main characters partly as victims of society rather than simple object lessons of the consequences of bad behavior. Manon came from the lower class. How can you be a victim if you have no rights? Massenet kept that in the opera. The opera shows the change in this girl, from the innocent 15-year-old to the woman in love, to the queen of Paris, to the greedy manipulator, to the fallen woman. Massenet assigns motifs to announce the presence of most of the main characters. They are consistent from start to finish, except for Manon's, which changes as she changes. The problem with Massenet is that he became unfashionable very soon after his death in 1912. He was perhaps regarded too much as stock-in-trade, and, until recently, we have rarely been able to hear the actual operas that made him one of the most popular Parisian musical figures of his time. He was to French opera what his contemporary Puccini was to the Italians - a man of immense popularity and stature, one feted by the claque and completely in tune with contemporary populist tastes. It is difficult not to view him as the Andrew Lloyd Webber of his day. Massenet's Manon is a French opera of more refined and delicate charms than Puccini's booming, Italianate Manon Lescaut, although both are based on the same Abbé Prevost novel. It is a big opera, but for best effect it needs a production with the intimacy of opéra comique which makes it ideal for the confines of Lambert Hall.

With the death of Jules Massenet, which occurred on August 14, 1912 France lost her most popular and, besides Camille Saint-Saëns, most famous composer—a composer on whose actual merits, perhaps, exacting critics do not agree, but whose career may well be described as an almost uninterrupted series of successes. Jules Massenet was born, May 12, 1842, at Montaud, then a suburb of Saint-Etienne, the great manufacturing city of the centre of France—the youngest of twenty-one children. His biographers relate many more or less romantic anecdotes showing his early propensity for music; telling us, for instance, how his keen desire to study the art impelled him to escape from home with the intention of going to Paris and the hope of finding there the suitable teacher whom he had vainly sought in Saint-Etienne. His father, a manufacturer ruined by the Revolution of 1848, left Montaud for Paris, and there the boy became, in 1851, a pupil of the Conservatoire, studying the pianoforte in Laurent's class and winning the first prize in 1859. He began to learn harmony with Bazin in 1853; but after this master (a poor musician and poor teacher) had discouraged him, he became a pupil of Reber. In 1860 he entered Ambroise Thomas's class of composition, and in 1863 he won the first prize for fugue and the Grand Prix de Rome. His first works were principally songs and short pianoforte pieces, orchestral suites of facile and unpretentious style, a short opera-comique in one act, 'La Grand Tante' (produced in Paris, 1867), and a 'Requiem' (unpublished). In 1868 he made the acquaintance of the publisher, Georges Hartmann, who from the very outset had faith in him and greatly assisted him during the first stages of his career.

Massenet's first ambitious work, the opéra-comique in four acts, 'Don César de Bazan' (Paris, 1872), was an absolute failure. But in 1873 the young composer scored two decisive successes with the incidental music to Leconte de Lisle's tragedy, 'Les Erynnies,' and with the dramatic oratorio, 'Marie-Magdeleine,' both of which were performed at the Théâtre de l'Odeon. As early as 1876 he was decorated with the Légion d'Honneur. In 1877, 'Le Roi de Lahore,' one of his best operatic scores (although comparatively little known), was produced at the Paris Opéra; the following year he was elected professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire and member of the Institut, thus succeeding his former teacher and vituperator François Bazin. Since then, and until the end of his life, honours, fame and fortune came to him in profusion. The absolute failure of a comparatively great quantity of his works passed unperceived under the favour of several radiant and protracted triumphs, the most memorable of which are those of 'Manon' (Paris, Opéra-Comique, 1884),
‘Werther’ (Vienna, 1892; Paris, Opéra-Comique, 1893), and ‘Thaïs’ (Paris, Opéra, 1894). ‘Esclarmonde,’ which, when produced in 1889 at the Opéra-Comique, had a very satisfactory run of performances, has never since been revived until the Met presented it in November 1976 for 10 performances with Joan Sutherland and Giaconno Aragal conducted by her husband Richard Bonynge. Massenet has certainly been one of the most prolific of French composers. He has written no less than twenty-four operas or opéra-comiques (three of which, ‘Panurge,’ ‘Amadis,’ and ‘Cleopâtre,’ are as yet unknown, but we are told, are ready for publication), incidental music for several plays, pianoforte pieces, a great quantity of songs, choruses, and a few specimens of church-music. Besides ‘Marie-Magdeleine,’ he has composed the oratorios ‘Eve’ (1875), ‘La Vierge’ (1880), ‘La Terre Promise’ (1900), and the lyric scenes, ‘Narcisse’ (1878), and ‘Biblis’ (1887). His instrumental music is neither very abundant nor very pregnant, consisting chiefly of picturesque suites and other minor works. He never attempted to deal with the more earnest types of instrumental forms except once, and this attempt (a Pianoforte concerto written in 1903) was pronounced a failure even by his most enthusiastic devotees. The last opera of his performed during his lifetime, ‘Roma’ (Paris, Opéra, 1911), is also an isolated and not particularly felicitous attempt towards classical severity and grandeur. Massenet’s prolonged and widespread success is one of the puzzling phenomena of modern musical history. While those who look a little below the surface find his music inexpressibly monotonous, casual hearers are surprised by his superficial versatility. Few of the real lovers of music will expect any of his works to remain among the compositions that keep their popularity after the death of the author. Harsh as it may appear, I believe this verdict to be a sound one. The chief idiosyncrasy of Massenet, as a man and as an artist, was an overwhelming desire to court success. His object was to seduce; and from the time that his music proved effective and became popular, he carefully avoided changing his manner. The characteristic melody ‘à la Massenet,’ graceful and elegant enough, but almost stereotyped, runs through all his scores, doing duty for Manon and Thaïs alike, for Roman Vestal or for gay Spanish lady, for dreamy German maiden and for Roman Vestal; and from the plain reason that he never attempted to renovate his style, he sank into sheer mannerism. Indeed, one can but marvel that so gifted a musician, who lacked neither individuality nor skill, should have so utterly succeeded in throwing away his gifts. Success spoiled him. As M. Claude Debussy once humorously remarked, ‘he fell a victim to the butterfly-play of fascinating lady admirers.’ Hence the monotony of works in the greater part of which he sedulously resorts to his favourite never-failing devices. Hence, also, the ‘superficial versatility.’ For if the actual progress of musical art during the past forty years left Massenet unmoved (and indeed he has taken no part in the evolution of modern music), the success of certain works appears to have influenced him not inconsiderably, inducing him to attempt a number of changes in manner if not in style. Thus, at a time when Wagner’s dramas were becoming the order of the day in Paris, he wrote ‘Esclarmonde,’ in which the example of ‘Lohengrin’ is easily traceable. The popularity of Italian ‘veristic’ opera helps to account for the appearance in 1894 of ‘La Navarraise,’ and in 1897 of ‘Sapho’; and Humperdinck’s ‘Hansel und Gretel’ seems to have prompted him to write ‘Cendrillon’ (1899). The earnest ideals, the thirst for progress that are inseparable from genius remained unknown to him. He directed his ambitions towards a less distant goal. He wrote for this time, and his time has repaid his labours well, as appears from the history of his life and deeds. Avoiding arduous roads, well satisfied with what was within his grasp, he remained untormented by doubt or by longing. As a man he was not only kind, but courteous and eager to court favour, lavish in praise upon all young composers or artists who came into contact with him. He held the position of Professor of Composition at the Paris Conservatoire until 1896, his principal pupils being Alfred Bruneau, Gustave Charpentier, Gabriel Pierné, Xavier Leroux, Paul Vidal, Georges Marty, Lucien Hillemacher, and Augustin Savard. He can hardly be said to have exercised a wholesome influence as a teacher, and generally speaking, such of his pupils as have displayed more than ordinary merits as composers did not follow his example. In the works of M. Alfred Bruneau, for instance, no trace of Massenet’s methods is to be found, except for a few melodic mannerisms. Not even as much remains in those of M. Pierné or M. Savard. In addition to the works mentioned above, Massenet wrote the following: ‘Bérangère et Anatole’ (1876), ‘Hérodiade’ (1881; London Opera House, 1911), ‘Le Cid’ (1885), ‘Le Mage’ (1889), ‘Le Carillon’ (1892), ‘Grisélidis’ (1901), ‘Chérubin’ (1905), ‘Ariane’ (1906), ‘Bacchus’ (1909), ‘Don Quichotte’ (1910; London Opera House, 1912). The funeral of M. Massenet took place at Egreville on August 17, and in accordance with the composer’s wishes, was simple in character. Only members of the family were invited. Wreaths were sent by the Prince of Monaco, M. Gunsbourg (director of the Monte Carlo Opera), and by M. Carré (for the Opéra-Comique).

William M. Weibel
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Artistic Director, William M. Weibel, and Managing Director, William Haase, invite you to join them in their commitment to ensure the future of Opera in the Heights.

We thank the following members of The Heritage Society for their thoughtful generosity: Ron Borschow, William Haase, John Kellett, Reba Kochersperger, Angul McReynolds, William Nettles, Maria Thomas, Robert S. Toth, and William Weibel.

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