



FIRST PRODUCTION BY THE METROPOLITAN OPERA CO.

# THE ROBIN WOMAN

(Shanewis)

## An American Opera

(In One Act)

Libretto by  
Nelle Richmond Eberhart

Music by  
Charles Wakefield Cadman

PRICE \$2.00

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## Foreword

The composer of this opera wishes to acknowledge the courtesy of those ethnologists and Indian folksong investigators who have so kindly allowed their gleanings of primitive vocal utterance to be used and idealized in this score.

He would thank Alice Cunningham Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, Frances Densmore, Natalie Curtis and Frederick Burton for themes in their entirety, partial themes or fragmentary themes which were suggestive of color and form and afforded many a rhythmic and melodic foundation for certain episodes.

Without going into details as to how many themes have been employed and at what exact spot, it might be of interest to know that the intermezzo is based upon an Omaha Indian song from a collection of game songs by Miss Fletcher; that the "Spring Song of the Robin Woman" is founded in part upon a Cheyenne melody recorded by Miss Curtis; and that the finale of the first scene and two narratives of Shanewis have their suggestion in themes from "Burton's American Primitive Music." As mentioned in a footnote, an Osage ceremonial song has been used for the Powwow scene just as recorded by Francis La Flesche.

The composer does not call this an *Indian* opera. In the first place the story and libretto bear upon a phase of present-day American life with the Indian in transition. As it is not a mythological tale nor yet an aboriginal story, and since more than three-fourths of the actual composition of the work lies within the boundaries of original creative effort (that is: not built upon native tunes in any way) there is no reason why this work should be labeled an Indian opera. Let it be an opera upon an American subject or if you will — an American opera!

CHARLES WAKEFIELD CADMAN

# Argument

Mrs. J. Asher Everton, a wealthy widow and prominent club woman of southern California, has become interested in Shanewis, a beautiful educated Indian girl of musical promise, sending her to New York for vocal training. After several years' study, Shanewis is invited by her benefactress to spend the summer in her bungalow by the sea. A few days before, Amy Everton has returned home from a long trip abroad following her graduation from Vassar and, in honor of both girls, Mrs. Everton gives a dinner dance and musicale. Shanewis, who does not dine before singing, makes her first appearance before Mrs. Everton's guests when she comes into the music room to sing.

Her initial number, "The Spring Song of the Robin Woman," a Tsimshian legend, together with the thrilling quality of her voice, her undoubted histrionic ability, and her engaging smile, create a sensation even among the older, more critical guests.

Lionel Rhodes, the childhood sweetheart and acknowledged fiance of Amy, is fascinated by the charm and novelty of Shanewis. He sees first her photograph which, he declares, recalls to his memory a beautiful face which had attracted him in Arizona two or three years before. Upon meeting her, he names her immediately "Enchantress," "The Robin Woman" who calls springtime to the heart, and he makes impetuous love to her behind a screen of palms while the guests are out on the terrace dancing. Shanewis is at first shy, but, finally, not knowing of his engagement to the daughter of her benefactress, she yields to his wooing conditionally. The condition is that he go with her to her home on the reservation to see if her family be any bar to his regard. He consents and their interview is terminated by the entrance of Amy with a young man who seeks the next dance with the Indian girl. Surprised and annoyed by their evident confusion at her interruption, Amy jealously protests to Lionel, and is not re-assured by his half-hearted efforts to propitiate her. She begins to fear that her long absence has weakened the bond between her and her lover. Throwing herself upon his breast she cries, "Ah, suppose you ceased to love me!" At this moment, the clock strikes twelve and the guests hasten in to take their departure. They congratulate Mrs. Everton and Shanewis, rallying Amy, teasingly, about her lover's interest in the Indian girl. As the guests disappear through the hall door, Shanewis switches off the music room lights and stands in the moonlight alone, dreaming of the romance which has so suddenly come to her.

The second part takes place in Oklahoma a few days later. With a plausible excuse, Shanewis has left Mrs. Everton for the reservation where Lionel has secretly followed her. They are discovered watching the closing scenes of a big summer pow wow. Instead of being repelled, the gay and brilliant pageant, the mingling of traditional, of transitional and of modern Indian life appeals to his strong sense of the picturesque. He watches with lively interest the crowds about the refreshment booths, the gay blankets, the Indian mothers with babies in cradle-boards, the dancers in regalia, and the white visitors in holiday attire. The ceremonial songs, even, move him strangely, so that his impulsive love for Shanewis grows stronger in the vivid atmosphere which belongs to her. Therefore when Philip Harjo, a fanatical young Indian devoted to the old traditions, presents Shanewis with a poisoned arrow once used by a maiden of the tribe to revenge herself upon a white betrayer, he is piqued and assures Harjo that Shanewis will never have use for such a weapon.

Harjo, the foster brother of Shanewis, is an idealist who has brooded over the wrongs of his people until he has acquired a morbid hatred of the white race and resents all attempts at modern civilization. From childhood he has loved Shanewis, but as she grew older and became ambitious for musical training, he kept his passion secret, hoping she would fail to win recognition and be driven by her failure back to her tribe and his love. Her love for a white man comes like a blow to his hopes and his traditions. He is suspicious of Lionel's impulsive attachment and, throughout the pow wow he watches his chance to prove his rival faithless.

Lionel and Shanewis attract much attention especially among the white people. A Jazz Band of young people serenades them, and young high school girls hover around allured by the handsome Californian. Lionel begs Shanewis to leave early but she insists on staying to the end. When the crowd has

nearly all departed, the booths have been stripped, and Shanewis has accepted the poisoned arrow from Harjo. Mrs. Everton and Amy hasten up in traveling costume. They strive to check Lionel's mad infatuation for Shanewis. He refuses absolutely to return with them and declares anew his love for Shanewis. But the Indian girl, learning for the first time of his engagement to Amy, rejects his love with scorn. She insists upon surrendering him to Amy, thus repaying her debt to Mrs. Everton. Passionately she denounces the white race and its dealings with her people. She then declares her intention of retiring from civilization to seek refuge in the forest, near to God, to recover from her wound. Recognizing the evolutionary distance between her and that other maid who sought revenge for treachery, she throws the bow and arrow far from her.

Though all the other Indians had left at the beginning of the altercation, Philip Harjo watches the scene from behind a tree. As Shanewis repulses Lionel, Harjo rushes out, snatches up the bow and arrow and shoots the young man straight in the heart. Shanewis runs back; she and Amy kneel beside him, while Mrs. Everton frantically attempts to drag Amy from the scene. Shanewis looks upward, saying, "'Tis well. In death thou art mine!"

NELLE RICHMOND EBERHART

(The sketch of the story was given by Tsianina Redfeather of the Creek tribe.)

## NOTE

For added spectacular effect, the musicale in Part One may be given in costume, the guests impersonating characters representing the various phases of America in the Making. The following are suggestions:

Mrs. Everton . . . . .	Queen Isabella of Spain
Amy Everton . . . . .	Evangeline
Lionel Rhodes . . . . .	John Alden
Shanewis . . . . .	Pocahontas

## CHORUS

Sir Francis Drake  
 Marquis de Lafayette  
 Hernando de Cortez  
 Thaddeus Kosciuszko  
 Leif Ericsson  
 John Paul Jones  
 Robert Fulton  
 George Washington  
 Abraham Lincoln  
 Ralph Waldo Emerson  
 Susan B. Anthony  
 Anne Hutchinson  
 Betsy Ross  
 Martha Washington  
 Rip van Winkle  
 Salem Witches  
 Cavaliers  
 Quakers  
 Franciscan Monks  
 Norsemen  
 Creoles  
 Cow Boys