

= The Indian Princess (play) =

The Indian Princess ; or , La Belle Sauvage , is a musical play with a libretto by James Nelson Barker and music by John Bray , based on the Pocahontas story as originally recorded in John Smith 's The Generall Historie of Virginia (1624) . The piece is structured in the style of a Ballad @-@ opera , with songs and choruses , and also has music underlying dialogue , like a melodrama . Pocahontas persuades her father , King Powhatan , to free Smith and becomes attracted to John Rolfe , breaking off her arranged marriage with a neighboring tribal prince , an action that leads to war . Her tribe wins the war , but her father loses trust in the white settlers ; Pocahontas warns the settlers who reconcile with Powhatan . Several comic romances end happily , and Smith predicts a great future for the new country .

The play deals with relations between Native Americans and the first European settlers in America . Scholars have debated whether the piece is progressive in its depiction of the natives and have commented that the work reflects an emerging American dramatic and musical sensibility . It served to popularize and romanticize the Pocahontas story as an important American myth .

The comedy was first performed in 1808 at The Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia . It has been cited as the first play about American Indians by an American playwright known to be produced on a professional stage , and possibly the first play produced in America to be then performed in England , although the validity of both statements has been questioned . Its portrayal of Native Americans has been criticized as racially insensitive , but the piece is credited with inspiring a whole new genre of plays about Pocahontas specifically and Native Americans in general , that was prevalent throughout the 19th and early 20th Century . The play was subsequently produced throughout the country .

= = Background = =

Barker was motivated to create a truly " American " style of drama to counteract what he saw as " mental colonialism " and the American tendency to feel culturally inferior to Europe . For this reason , he looked to native subject matter for the play , as opposed to other American dramatists like John Howard Payne who neglected American subject matter and locations .

Although in his preface , Barker cites his primary source of inspiration as John Smith 's The Generall Historie of Virginia (1624) , he was likely more influenced by a series of popular books by John Davis , including , Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America (1803) , Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas (1805) , and The First Settlers of Virginia (1806) which featured a more sexualized and romanticized characterization of Pocahontas .

Much of the known background about the piece comes from a letter Barker wrote to William Dunlop , dated June 10 , 1832 . In it , he indicates that he had been working on The Indian Princess for a number of years before it was first produced in 1808 . In fact in 1805 , he wrote a Masque entitled " America " (which has not survived) that he intended to serve as a conclusion to the play , in which characters called " America , " " Science , " and " Liberty " sing and engage in political debate . Barker originally intended the piece as a play without music , but John Bray , an actor / translator / composer employed by The New Theatre in Philadelphia , convinced him to add a musical score .

= = Character list = =

The published dramatis personæ divides the character list into ? Europeans ? (the settlers) and ? Virginians ? (the natives) , listing the men first , by rank , followed by the women and the supernumeraries .

= = Plot synopsis = =

= = = Act I = = =

At the Powhatan River , Smith , Rolfe , Percy , Walter , Larry , Robin , and Alice disembark from a barge as the chorus of soldiers and adventurers sing about the joy of reaching the shore . Larry , Walter , Alice (Walter ? s wife) , and Robin reminisce about love , and Robin admits to Larry his lustful feelings about Alice . Meanwhile , Nima is preparing a bridal gown for Pocahontas in the royal village of Werocomoco , but Pocahontas expresses displeasure about the arrangement her father made for her to marry Miami , a rival Indian prince . Smith is then attacked by a party of Indians , including Nantaquas , Pocahontas ? s brother . Due to his fighting prowess , Nantaquas thinks he is a god , but Smith explains he is only a trained warrior from across the sea . The Indians capture Smith to bring him to their chief . Back at the Powhatan River , Robin attempts to seduce Alice , but is foiled by Walter and Larry . When Walter tells the group about Smith ? s capture , they depart to go after him . Before they leave , Rolfe tries to convince Percy to move on after his lover , Geraldine , apparently was unfaithful .

= = = Act II = = =

When King Powhatan is presented with the captured Smith , he decides , at the urging of the tribe ? s priest Grimosco , to execute him . Pocahontas , having been moved by Smith ? s nobility , says she will not allow Smith to be killed unless she herself dies with him . This persuades Powhatan to free Smith . Soon , Percy and Rolfe encounter Smith and his Indian allies on the way back to the settlement , and Rolfe is immediately struck by Pocahontas , whose manner suggests the attraction is mutual . They speak of love , but Rolfe must soon depart with Smith . Pocahontas confesses her love for Rolfe to Miami , who receives the news with anger , jealousy and rage . Pocahontas convinces her father to dissolve her arranged engagement with Miami , which will mean war between their two tribes .

= = = Act III = = =

Jamestown has now been built and Walter tells his wife Alice about Powhatan ? s victory over Miami . They then discuss a banquet hosted by Powhatan that Smith , Rolfe and Percy will attend . Meanwhile , Pocahontas and Nima witness Grimosco and Miami plotting to kill the European settlers . When Grimosco coerces Powhatan into believing he should kill all the White men , by casting doubt about their intentions , creating fear about how they will act in the future , and invoking religious imagery , Pocahontas runs to warn the settlers about the danger . Back in Jamestown , a comic bit ensues in which Larry ? s wife Kate has arrived disguised as a male page , and teases him before revealing herself . She says she has come with Percy ? s lover , Geraldine , also disguised as a page , who has come to convince Percy he was wrong about her infidelity . Pocahontas arrives and convinces the settlers to go to Powhatan ? s palace to rescue their colleagues from Grimosco ? s plot . They arrive just in time to prevent the disaster . Grimosco is taken away , and Miami stabs himself in shame . Everyone else has a happy ending : Pocahontas is with Rolfe , Walter is with Alice , Larry is with Kate , Percy is with Geraldine , and even Robin is with Nima . Smith forgives Powhatan , and gives the play 's final speech , predicting a great future for the new country that will form in this land .

= = Score = =

The surviving published version of the musical score appears in the format of a simplified keyboard transcription using a two @-@ staff system (treble and bass) . It includes only occasional notations about the instruments used in the original full orchestral score , which has not survived . Therefore , musical elements from the original production such as inner harmonic parts , countermelodies , and accompaniment figurations are no longer known . Based on records of payments made to musicians at The Chestnut Street Theatre at the time of the premiere , it was likely that the production employed approximately 25 pieces , which may have consisted of pairs of woodwinds (flutes ,

oboes , clarinets , and bassoons) and brasses (horns and trumpets) as well as some timpani and strings . Typically , however , the entire orchestra was used only for the overture and selected large chorus numbers , while solo numbers were accompanied by strings and one or two pairs of woodwinds . The brasses and timpani may have been used to invoke a sense of the military in numbers like Walter ' s ? Captain Smith . ?

= = Performances = =

The play first premiered at The Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia on April 6 , 1808 . In Barker 's letter to Dunlop , he writes the performance was done as a benefit for Mr. Bray (who also played the role of Walter) . However , other sources suggest it was a benefit for a Mrs. Woodham . In any case , it is clear that the performance was interrupted by an offstage commotion which may have cut the performance short . Mr. Webster , a tenor who played the role of Larry , was an object of public scorn at the time because of his effeminate manner and dress , and audience members rioted in outrage at his participation , causing Barker himself to order the curtain to be dropped . The play was subsequently performed again in Philadelphia on February 1 , 1809 , although it was advertised for January 25 .

There is some discrepancy about the date of the New York premiere , which took place at The Park Theatre , either on June 14 , 1808 , or on January 14 , 1809 , as a benefit for English actress Mrs. Lipman . It was performed again in New York as a benefit for Dunlop on June 23 , 1809 , There was a performance benefiting Bray and an actor named Mr. Cone advertised for August 25 , 1808 , at The Alexandria Theatre in Virginia . There was also a gala premiere on an unspecified date in Baltimore . Barker wrote in his letter to Dunlop that the play was subsequently and frequently performed in all the theatres across the country . It was the standard practice in all these productions for the Native American roles to be played by white actors wearing dark makeup .

The The Indian Princess has been cited as the first well @-@ documented case of a play that was originally performed in America being subsequently staged in England . Although records indicate there was a play called Pocahontas ; or the Indian Princess , credited as being adapted by T.A. Cooper , that played The Theatre Royal at Drury Lane in London on December 15 , 1820 , and subsequently on December 16 and December 19 , the piece differed drastically from Barker 's original and featured a completely different cast of characters . Barker himself wrote that the production was done without his permission or even his knowledge , and based on a critical response he read of the London performance , he deduced that there was very little in the play that was his own . Other evidence suggests that the script used in England was not only a completely different play , but that it was likely not even originated by an American . This assertion is based primarily on three factors : the kinder and meeker portrayal of the Natives , which reduces the grandeur of the play 's American heroes , the more vague listing of the setting as " North America " rather than specifically " Virginia , " and the lack of implications about America 's great destiny that was evident in Barker 's version . The distinction between the London and American versions is also supported by a review of the London production , in which the reviewer cites a lack of comic characters (Barker ' s version included several) , and the presence of a character named ? Opechancaough , ? who is nowhere to be found in Barker ' s play .

= = Style and structure = =

Structurally , the play resembles a typical English Ballad @-@ opera . The plot of the play can be seen as a blending of a comedy of racial and cultural stereotypes with a love story and an historical drama . Barker borrows heavily from Shakespearean comedy , as can be seen most blatantly in the gender disguises employed by the characters of Kate and Geraldine . The use of verse writing for higher class characters and prose for those of lesser status also borrows from the Shakespearean tradition . It is of note that Pocahontas switches from prose to verse after falling in love with Rolfe .

The Indian Princess is also one of the first American plays to call itself a ? melo @-@ drame ? (or melodrama) which literally is French for ? play with music . ? Like the French and German

melodramas typical of the period , the score contained open @-@ ended snippets of background mood music that can be repeated as much as necessary to heighten the sentimentality of the drama , although some have argued that it bears no other resemblance to the typical French melodrama of the period . Still others have said that the categorization of the piece as a melodrama is accurate , considering the play ' s portrayal of the genre ' s typical persecuted heroine (Pocahontas) , villainous antagonists (Miami and Grimosco) , virtuous hero (Smith) , and comic relief (Robin and others) .

The play can also be seen as a predecessor to the exaggerated emotionalism of later American drama , and as an early example of how background music would be used in more modern American drama and films .

= = Analysis and criticism = =

The Indian Princess is one example of an attempt by an artist of the early 19th Century to define an American national identity . Pocahontas , representing the spirit of America , literally shields Smith from injury and serves as foster mother , protecting colonists from famine and attack , achieving mythic status as a heroic mother , and preserving , nurturing and legitimizing America as a country . The play allows for an acknowledgement of the troubling aspects of the nation ' s history of conquest , violence , and greed , by couching the negative implications in a romantic plot . In other words , the romantic conquest helps to soften the harshness and brutality of the colonial conquest . The success of the play reflects a larger cultural desire to express its sense of self through the Pocahontas myth .

Barker also had commercial interests , and was motivated by a drive for artistic and financial success . In this vein , the play was an attempt to please the anglophile public , but create something truly American in setting and theme . The portrayals of the Indians in the play , from a perspective of racial sensitivity , have been met with mixed reviews by modern critics . Some write positively about the portrayals , saying that , other than Grimosco and Miami , the natives are noble , though primitive , and have a more ' American ' value system than the savages traditionally portrayed in British media of the period . Others , however , see the characters portrayed stereotypically as lusty , childlike , weak and corruptible beings , with the exceptions of Pocahontas and Nantaquas , who are portrayed positively only because they accept English values . Still others take a middle ground , noting the range of representations . In any case , the play can be seen as a justification of White assimilation of the natives , especially when examining Pocahontas ' s choice to be with Rolfe as a microcosm of their societies .

Critics have pointed out several inherent flaws in the script , including the early placement of the play ' s climax (Smith at the chopping block) at the beginning of Act II , loose construction , song lyrics that trivialize characters , and a main character in Pocahontas that is somewhat stilted and overly poetic . In contrast , however others have argued that Pocahontas ' s love scene in Act III is where the truest poetry of the piece emerges .

There has been less critique of Bray ' s musical work , but Victor Fell Yellin tried to recreate what he felt was the score ' s melodic expressiveness and sonorous grandeur in his 1978 recording of it . In the liner notes , he points out that the music does not critically compare with the great musical masters of its time , but its success is derived from its charm . While it lacks modulation , it contains well @-@ turned melodic and rhythmic phrases , and syncopations that add to its American style .

The Indian Princess certainly began a long American tradition of romanticizing and sexualizing Pocahontas , who was only a child in Smith ' s original accounts . Therefore , it deserves recognition for inaugurating a genre , but it can be criticized for diminishing the potential richness of the subject matter .

= = Historical significance = =

Barker 's The Indian Princess has been cited as the first American play featuring Native American characters to ever be staged , although Barker 's play is predated by at least two offerings by

Europeans featuring Native Americans , including Tammany in 1794 by British playwright Ann Kemble Hatton , and German writer Johann Wilhelm Rose 's Pocahontas : Schauspiel mit Gesang , in fünf Akten (A Play with Songs , in five Acts) in 1784 . At least one American play was also written before Barker 's : Ponteach , published by Robert Rogers in 1766 , though the piece was apparently never produced . However , more recently uncovered evidence shows a record of an anonymous melodrama entitled Captain Smith and the Princess Pocahontas produced at The Chestnut Street Theatre in 1806 , calling into question whether Barker 's play was really the first of its kind (though no further information is known about the earlier piece) . Barker 's play has also been cited as the earliest surviving dramatized account of Smith and Pocahontas , although this idea is debunked by the availability of the aforementioned Johann Wilhelm Rose work .

In any case , The Indian Princess is credited as being primarily responsible for elevating the Pocahontas story to one of the nation 's most celebrated myths , and is thought to mark the beginning of the popular American genre of Indian Drama . The piece is also of note as one of very few of its time to have the entire musical score published and available today , as opposed to only individual popular songs .

Barker 's play directly or indirectly inspired many other stage adaptations of the Pocahontas story , including :

Pocahontas , or the Settlers of Virginia by George Washington Parke Custis (1830)

Pocahontas by Robert Dale Owen (1837)

The Forest Princess by Charlotte B. Conner (1848)

Pocahontas , or The Gentle Savage by John Brougham (1855)

Pocahontas by Welland Hendrick (1886)

Pocahontas by Edwin O. Ropp (1906)

Royalty in Old Virginia by Effie Koogle (1908)

Pokey ; Or , The Beautiful Legend on the Amorous Indian by Phillip Moeller (1918)

Pocahontas and the Elders by Virgil Geddes (1933)

The Founders by Paul Green (1957)

Additionally , there were approximately 40 plays with Indian themes recorded from 1825 to 1860 that likely were directly influenced by The Indian Princess . Edward Henry Corbould 's engraving (c . 1850) , ? Smith Rescued by Pocahontas ? was possibly also directly inspired by The Indian Princess . Disney 's animated Pocahontas (1995) is one of the more recent of several films also in the same tradition as Barker 's play .