

TOLEDO OPERA

THE  
**BALLAD OF  
BABY DOE**

BY DOUGLAS MOORE



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**Friday, April 12, 2019**

**Sunday, April 14, 2019**

**Valentine Theatre**

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**Audience Preview Guide**

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## The Setting

The opera takes place in and around Leadville, Colorado, late 19th Century.

### Act I

- Scene 1: Outside the Tabor Opera House, Leadville, 1880
- Scene 2: Outside the Clarendon Hotel, later that evening.
- Scene 3: The Tabor Apartment, several months later.
- Scene 4: The lobby of the Clarendon Hotel, shortly thereafter.
- Scene 5: Augusta’s Parlor in Denver, a year later.
- Scene 6: A suite in the Willard Hotel, Washington, D.C., 1883

### Act II

- Scene 1: The Windsor Hotel, Denver, 1893
- Scene 2: A Club Room in Denver, 1895
- Scene 3: The Matchless Mine, 1896
- Scene 4: Augusta’s Parlor, November, 1896
- Scene 5: The stage of the Tabor GrandTheatre, April, 1899.

## Characters

The Ballad of Baby Doe  
by Douglas Moore  
Libretto by John LaTouche

Horace Tabor - mayor of Leadville  
Augusta - wife of Horace Tabor  
Mr.s Elizabeth (Baby) Doe - a miner’s wife  
Mama McCourt - Baby Doe’s mother  
William Jennings Bryan - candidate for President  
Chester A. Arthur- President of the United States  
Father Chapelle - priest at the wedding  
Samantha - a maid

## Synopsis

### ACT I

Horace Tabor, for the most part, owns the entire town of Leadville, Colorado. After his newly constructed opera house is opened, he stands in front of the gathered townsfolk and sings praises about it while taking jabs at his wife, Augusta. During the opera’s intermission, Augusta pulls Horace aside to scold him for his behavior in public. Before their conversation can escalate further, they are interrupted by a woman near the end of the intermission asking them to direct her to a hotel. Horace kindly recounts the directions to her before returning to the opera with Augusta.

Horace and Augusta return home once the opera concludes. Augusta readies herself for the evening and retreats to the bedroom while Horace grabs a cigar and exits to the front porch. Two women happen to pass by talking about the woman whom Horace gave directions to at the opera earlier that evening. Horace can hear her voice wafting from her hotel window, and he immediately applauds her when she finishes. Baby Doe is startled by his shouts since she believed herself to be her only audience. Following his applause, Horace responds with a song of his own, but after a few shouts from Augusta’s bedroom, he zips his mouth and hurries inside.

A few months later, Augusta finds a box tucked away in Horace’s study. With a slight grin, she opens the package and finds a fine pair of gloves and a love letter. To her surprise and dissatisfaction, the gift is addressed to Baby Doe. She thinks back to every rumor she’s heard about her husband since Baby Doe’s arrival into town and realizes they were all true. When Horace returns home, Augusta confronts him in a fit of rage. After much fighting, Horace confesses he never meant to hurt her.

In her hotel room, Baby Doe has been considering leaving town alone. She finally decides to do it and asks the hotel staff when the next train for Denver departs. Several staff members run to Horace and divulge Baby Doe’s plans. Meanwhile, as Baby Doe packs her belongings, she pens a letter to her mother detailing her love for Horace. Augusta soon enters demanding that Baby Doe leave. Baby Doe agrees, but not before telling her that her relationship with Horace, though wrong, has no cause for shame. Augusta turns away and walks out the door just moments before Horace comes in. With his arrival, Baby Doe changes her mind and stays. Horace couldn’t be happier. After a year has passed, Horace now lives with Baby Doe, while Augusta stays with friends in Denver. Augusta finds out that Horace has decided to divorce her. In her anger, she swears revenge, promising to ruin his life.

Months go by and Horace and Baby Doe are about to get married in Washington, DC. The couple have become very wealthy and Baby Doe’s mother praises them for it, while the housewives in attendance ridicule them. However, their conversations change when Baby Doe and Horace step out into the party. Baby Doe and Horace mingle among the crowd and join in the debate about the silver standard, with the Dandies saying they prefer the gold standard. Horace surprises Baby Doe with a beautiful diamond necklace that once belonged to Queen Isabella. Baby Doe’s mother converses with the Roman Catholic priest and informs him that both Baby Doe and Horace were previously married but got divorced. The priest had no idea, which is overheard by several of the catty women. Soon, it’s a full-blown scandal. Thankfully, it is put to rest when the President of the United States comes in and gives a toast to Horace and Baby Doe.

### Intermission

### ACT II

Horace and Baby Doe have enjoyed a wealthy lifestyle for quite some time, but sadly, their fortune is dwindling. Augusta has repeatedly warned Horace of the gold standard, but he paid her no heed. He spent a great deal of his fortune backing presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, but when Bryan lost, Horace was abandoned by his party and not a single dollar was returned.

Now, nearly broke, Horace returns to the opera house he built many years before, which he sold and no longer owns. He takes a seat on the stage and begins to hallucinate about his past. He sees Augusta pleading with him, then taunting him, and has visions of his two daughters one of whom he is told will end up disowning his name, while the other turns to a life of prostitution. Horace becomes so upset he falls to the floor unconscious. Baby Doe enters the theater and rushes to his aid. After coming around, he is convinced by Baby Doe that she is not a hallucination. He believes her and says that nothing will ever come between them. Then, realizing his own mortality, he begs her not to forget him. Suddenly and without warning, he dies in her arms.

# Douglas Moore 1893-1969

Douglas Stuart Moore was an American composer, educator, and author who wrote music for the theater, ballet, and orchestra,

but his greatest fame is associated with his operas, *The Devil and Daniel Webster* and *The Ballad of Baby Doe*. Born in Long Island, New York, Moore's ancestors



Douglas Moore  
1893 - 1969

were among the first settlers on Long Island. He earned two degrees from Yale University, a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Music, and served in the U.S. Navy as a lieutenant. Apart from classical compositions, Moore also composed several popular songs while at Yale together with poet and Hotchkiss School classmate Archibald McAleish and later in collaboration with John Jacob Niles. He wrote the Yale fight song, *Goodnight, Harvard*. These songs were later published in 1921 under the collective title, *The Songs my Mother Never Taught Me*. Also in 1921, Moore was hired as Director of Music at the Cleveland Museum of Art and performed plays at the Cleveland Play House. He made his debut as a composer and conductor in 1923 conducting his *Four Museum Pieces* with the Cleveland Orchestra. He later collaborated with fellow Yale alumnus Stephen Vincent Benét on the folk opera, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*.

In 1926, Douglas Moore joined the faculty of Columbia University, where he remained until his retirement in 1962. In 1954, he was

a co-founder, with Otto Luening and Oliver Daniel, of the CRI (Composers Recordings, Inc) record label.

Moore's musical style is somewhat difficult to classify. During his artistic career, he developed a highly personal musical language, basically romantic and richly tonal, but with strong links to American folk music.

Moore is sometimes viewed as a conservative, mainly because he tended to resist influence of the various musical vogues that arose, and ultimately fell, during his life. His chosen style was what some regard as "typically American" (i.e., based on American folk music). Moore never actually used any authentic folk tunes, but rather created his own (much like Gustav Holst or Manuel de Falla). The creation of this style was greatly bolstered by Vachel Lindsay, founder of singing poetry, in the twenties, though Moore also allowed other styles influence him, such as jazz and ragtime. This is most readily apparent in his operas. *The Ballad of Baby Doe* has several rag elements (a honky-tonk piano is used extensively in the first scene) and in his 1958 "soap opera" *Gallantry*, the commercials for Lochinvar soap and Billy Boy wax are sung in a blueslike fashion.

One distinguishing characteristic of Moore's music is the modesty, grace, and tender lyricism that mark the slower passages of his many works, especially his *Symphony in A major* and the clarinet quintet. The faster movements of these compositions have a robust, jovial and a somewhat terpsichorean quality. Admittedly though, Moore was slower in development when it came to purely orchestral works and most of his energy was directed towards opera. He wrote eight operas, mostly on American subjects, though one notable exception is *Giants in the Earth* for which he won the 1951 Pulitzer Prize for Music.

# The Ballad of Baby Doe

## A Review

Excerpts from a review by Arthur Lazere of San Francisco Opera's September 27, 2000 performance of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*. Mr. Lazere founded [cultureculture.net](http://cultureculture.net) which continues to thrive today.

*The Ballad of Baby Doe*, which had its premiere in 1956, was commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation of the Library of Congress to commemorate the bicentennial of Columbia University. (Composer Douglas Moore was on the Columbia faculty.) It is one of the most popular American operas, one of very few to establish itself firmly in the contemporary repertoire, though only now getting its first production at San Francisco Opera.

Based on historical characters in the American west in the late nineteenth century, both the themes of the opera and Moore's music are unmistakably American. Horace Tabor was a Colorado silver mining tycoon, his success due, at least in part, to his marriage to Augusta, "the boss' daughter." But Augusta clings to social convention and middle class values, while Horace, from humbler beginnings, is less constrained, and as a frontier man and an entrepreneur, less judgmental. "Dollars from the saloon, dollars from the mines - makes no difference," he says.

Elizabeth "Baby" Doe arrives in town, having divorced her miner husband. She and Horace fall in love. Some months later Augusta learns of the affair and vows to break it up, but she fails - Horace divorces her and marries Baby Doe. Augusta is deeply bitter, and Horace and



Portrait of Baby Doe and her wedding dress  
1854 - 1935

Baby Doe, despite the huge financial success of the silver mines, are snubbed socially. Tabor's fortune is lost when the silver market collapses, but Baby Doe remains loyal to him.

The opera's setting is quintessentially American: the westward migration, a mining town at the frontier, populist politics, upward economic mobility, and the openness of democratic opportunity side-by-side with social climbing pretentiousness and class distinction.

The first act is largely expository, establishing characters and situation, but the second act changes gears in an unanticipated way. The plot line - the loss of fortune and the survival of true love - fades in importance, supplanted by an exploration of the characters of Augusta and Horace in unexpected psychological depth. The conflict that makes *Baby Doe* work with powerful theatrical effectiveness is not the conflict in the



Elizabeth "Baby" Doe  
1854 - 1935

# Baby Doe Tabor (continued)

romantic triangle, but the individual internal conflicts of Augusta and Horace as they reflect on their lives and behaviors, face their mortality, and try to find an elusive emotional and spiritual peace.



The wedding of Horace Tabor and Elizabeth "Baby" Doe, 1883

Baby Doe herself is far less complicated; she embodies down-to-earth values and an open and loving heart, loyal to her man even in reduced circumstances. But the character doesn't offer the introspective reflection that the others do, nor does she change with time and circumstances as the others do. Moore gives his soprano ravishingly beautiful arias, as shimmery as the silver itself, performed superbly in this production by Ruth Ann Swenson.

It was veteran mezzo Judith Forst's Augusta who became the more interesting, more sympathetic character in a performance acted and sung with profound conviction. After she refuses a request by Baby Doe's mother for help for the family when their money is gone, Augusta sings an aria that movingly explores her experience of rejection, her genuine yearning to overcome her bitterness, and her understanding

that her history with Horace is a part of her always. The aria ends with moving irony when Augusta is unable to make the leap to forgiveness, and in understanding that failing, defines both her humanity and her own tragedy.

Horace, too, gets a major aria of reflection in the final scene, at the darkened opera house of Leadville, his memories fleshed out with flashbacks running through his failing mind as he confronts both his past and his mortality. In the end, as snow starts to fall, it is only the constancy of Baby Doe's love that gives meaning to his life and hers. James Morris' performance captured both Horace's bravado and his underlying vulnerability.

Moore's music draws on folk themes, hymns, old waltzes. It is melodic and accessible, but also succeeds in maintaining a sufficiently dry edge to avoid the sort of cloying sentimentality that these sources might engender.

John Coyne's handsome production, with varying scenic elements set against a backdrop of rugged Rocky Mountains, set just the right tone, with smoothly accomplished transitions from scene to scene, the whole serving the story ideally without becoming intrusive.

In this, the third production of the current season, SFO finally got all the pieces together - fine singing and acting in an appropriate production of an American opera that is thoughtful, sophisticated, and genuinely moving.

# What to Listen For

*The Ballad of Baby Doe* contains some beautiful, lyric music. The opera was originally written for the iconic American opera superstar, Beverly Sills who starred as Elizabeth Baby Doe. Here are a few clips of this tale of the West as it was being settled.

## **Willow where we met together (Baby Doe)**

Beverly Sills originated the role in 1956.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_BJK8G6Zlw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_BJK8G6Zlw)

## **The Silver Aria (Baby Doe)**

Beverly Sills sings of the love of precious metals.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaiBfU5MnzU>

## **Always through the changing (Baby Doe)**

Beverly Sills singing her iconic role.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKxL5TZW6HY>

## **Warm as the autumn light (Horace Tabor)**

Original Horace Tabor Walter Cassell sings this beautiful aria.



<https://youtu.be/C-SK4RO7Jvo>

## **Divorce? Not on your life! (Augusta Tabor)**

Joyce Castle takes on the role of Augusta Tabor in this Central City Opera production.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgBeiwbqRag>



Baby Doe outside her shack circa 1930s

# What to Watch and Read

To explore the fascinating history of the very real people who inspired Douglas Moore's 1956 opera, *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, go to the following links:

## **VIDEO - Colorado Experience: The Tabors**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2quvBXAvmo>

## **ARTICLE - Rags, Riches & Scandal - The Tabor Triangle**

[www.legendsofamerica.com/co-tabor/6/](http://www.legendsofamerica.com/co-tabor/6/)

# In Moore's Time

**1893** Moore is born on August 10 in Cutchogue, Long Island, New York

**1894** Coca-Cola is sold in bottles for the first time

**1895** Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* premieres in St. Petersburg



Beverly Sills  
as Baby Doe

**1899** Al Capone, Alfred Hitchcock, Duke Ellington, and Ernest Hemingway all born

**1900** Giacomo Puccini's opera *Tosca* premieres in Rome

**1902** First Rose Bowl played; Michigan beats Stanford 49-0

**1903** Majestic Theatre, NY, 1st in US to employ women ushers

**1908** 1st time ball in Times Square dropped for NYE

**1912** RMS Titanic hits iceberg and sinks

**1914** Archduke of Austria assassinated sparking WWI

**1918** Tsar Nicholas II and his family are executed in Siberia

**1919** 19th Amendment passed giving women voting rights in U.S.

**1921** Moore hired as Director of Music at Cleveland Museum of Art

**1923** New York Yankees win their first World Series

**1925** Benito Mussolini dissolves Italian parliament and proclaims himself dictator

**1926** Moore joins the faculty of Columbia University

**1929** U.S. stock market crashes. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is born.

**1931** *Star Spangled Banner* officially becomes the U.S. national anthem by congressional resolution

**1934** RCA Victor releases 1st 33 1/3 recording (Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*)

**1936** Pope Francis is born



Horace Tabor

**1938** Moore's opera, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, premieres

**1940** Heinrich Himmler orders establishment of Auschwitz Death Camp

**1941** Japan attacks Pearl Harbor bringing the U.S. into WWII

**1942** American fashion designer Calvin Klein is born

**1944** Bernstein's *On The Town* opens in NYC

**1945** World War II ends

**1947** Lerner and Lowe's *Briarwood* opens on Broadway

**1949** Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* opens on Broadway

**1951** Moore wins the Pulitzer Prize for Music for *Giants in the Earth*

**1952** Britain's King George VI dies; Queen Elizabeth II ascends the throne

**1954** Oprah Winfrey, Jerry Seinfeld, Howard Stern, and Denzel Washington are born

**1956** *The Ballad of Baby Doe* premieres

**1958** Lego company patents their design of Lego blocks, still compatible with bricks produced today

**1959** Hawaii becomes the 50th U.S. state

**1960** In *Aida*, Leontyne Price becomes 1st African American to sing a lead at Teatro alla Scala

**1961** Moore's opera, *The Wings of the Dove*, premieres



Tabor Grand Opera House

**1963** President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas

**1965** *The Sound of Music* released winning Best Picture Oscar in 1966

**1974** *Star Trek* premieres on NBC TV

**1968** Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated in Memphis

**1969** Douglas Moore dies on July 25