

Turandot

Italian opera in three acts
by
Giacomo Puccini.

Libretto: Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, after *Turandotte*, (1772), a dramatic fairy tale and play by Carlo Gozzi.

Premiere: La Scala, April 1926, conducted by Arturo Toscanini

Turandot was Puccini's 12th and last opera. The composer died in 1924, two years before its premiere: Act III, Scene II, was composed posthumously from Puccini's own drafts by his pupil, Franco Alfano, under the supervision and direction of Arturo Toscanini.

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

<i>Story Synopsis</i>	<i>Page 2</i>
<i>Principal Characters in the Opera</i>	<i>Page 2</i>
<i>Story Narrative with Music Highlights</i>	<i>Page 3</i>
<i>Puccini and Turandot</i>	<i>Page 16</i>

the Opera Journeys Mini Guide Series

Published/Copywritten by Opera Journeys

www.operajourneys.com

Story Synopsis

In ancient Peking, China, the beautiful Princess Turandot has erected barriers to repel suitors: she will only wed a man of royal lineage who can answer her three riddles; anyone who fails will be executed.

Calaf, an enemy Tatar Prince in exile, travels in Peking incognito: the “Unknown Prince.” He accidentally finds his father, Timur, an old blind man who is accompanied by the young slave girl, Liù, secretly in love with Calaf. Calaf beholds Princess Turandot and becomes awestruck by her beauty; obsessed to possess her, he accepts her challenge to solve her riddles.

Calaf succeeds in the riddle contest, but Turandot repudiates her solemn promise and refuses to marry him. Magnanimously, Calaf offers Turandot his own riddle: if she can discover his name by dawn, he will free her from her promise and sacrifice his life to the executioner.

Turandot orders Liù tortured in order to discover the unknown Prince’s name: Liù kills herself rather than betray Calaf. Finally, Calaf melts Turandot’s resistance with a kiss, and then reveals his name to her. However, the victorious Turandot, now transformed from hostility to power emotions of love, does not condemn Calaf to death, but accepts him as her betrothed.

Principal Characters in the Opera

Turandot, a Princess	Soprano
Calaf, the “Unknown Prince.” son of Timur	Tenor
Timur, Calaf’s father, the dethroned Tatar King	Bass
Liù, a Tatar slave girl	Soprano
Altoum, Turandot’s father, Emperor of China	Tenor
Turandot’s Ministers:	
Ping, the Grand Chancellor	Tenor
Pang, the General Purveyor	Baritone
Pong, the Chief Cook	Baritone
A Mandarin	Baritone

The Prince of Persia, the Executioner,
mandarins, dignitaries, eight wise men,
Turandot’s attendants, soldiers,
and crowds of people

Time and Place: Ancient China,
the city of Peking

Story Narrative and Music Highlights

ACT I: Ancient China. The Imperial City of Peking at dawn

The walls of ancient Peking are surmounted with the heads of Turandot’s failed suitors. A Mandarin announces that the Prince of Persia failed to solve Princess Turandot’s three riddles and will be executed at moonrise. The agitated crowd, seething with barbaric enthusiasm, eagerly await the execution.

The opening chords are dissonant, C# Minor juxtaposed over D major, a chilling musical depiction of the executioner’s axe falling.

Opening Chords:

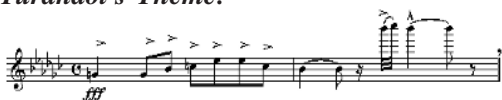


Amid the turmoil and confusion of the crowd, an old blind man appears, attended by a young slave girl, Liù: he is Timur, a Tatar King in exile after being vanquished by the Chinese. Timur falls, and the fragile Liù pleads for help from the bystanders.

Calaf emerges from among the crowd: he is Timur's son, a Prince of the Tatars; as an enemy, he is in mortal danger in Peking, so he travels incognito as the "Unknown Prince." Calaf rushes to help the old man, and becomes gratified to discover his father whom he thought dead. Liù reveals that she has dedicated her life to devotedly serve Timur, motivated by her secret love for the Prince; *Perchè un dì, nella reggia, mi hai sorriso*, "Because one day, you smiled upon me."

The Prince of Persia, defeated in his attempt to solve Turandot's riddles, is led to the scaffold. The crowd becomes strangely compassionate over his gruesome and barbaric fate, imploring Turandot to be merciful and pardon him: Calaf likewise expresses his indignation, cursing Turandot for her cruelty. Princess Turandot appears, indifferent to the pleas from the crowd, and with an imperious and definitive gesture, confirms the Prince of Persia's immediate execution.

Turandot's Theme:



Calaf, after seeing Princess Turandot for the first time, becomes overwhelmed, enraptured, and infatuated by her beauty: *O divina bellezza o meraviglia! O sogno*, "Oh divine and miraculous beauty, you are a dream." He now yearns to possess Turandot, explaining his uncontrollable, irrational passion to Timur and Liù: *Il suo profumo è nell'aria! È nell'anima!*, "Her perfume is in the air, it has penetrated my soul."

Calaf is resolved: he vows to challenge Turandot's riddles. Neither pleas from Timur, nor the barbaric execution of the Prince of Persia - whose last cry is heard as his head falls - can deter him. Timur warns him of his folly, but Calaf's passion has overcome reason: *quest'è la vita, padre*, "Here is where life is father." Calaf has become undaunted in purpose, fanatically obsessed to win Turandot's love.

Turandot's Three Ministers, Ping, Pang, and Pong, attempt to dissuade Calaf, explaining that it is futile and impossible to win Turandot's diabolical contest. They try to discourage him from annihilating himself with philosophical cynicism, that he should take 100 women, and then urge him to leave Peking. They fail: Calaf is intransigent, firmly resolved to challenge and win Turandot.

Liù pleads with Calaf to abandon his reckless obsession: *Signore ascolta*, "Sir please listen." Liù has dedicated her life to serve Timur, a sacrifice motivated by her love for the young Prince: his name remains engraved in her heart and soul, and she fears losing him; "If he should die tomorrow, she and Timur will die in exile: Timur will lose his beloved son, and I, a beloved smile."

Liù: Signore ascolta!

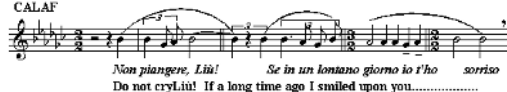
Adagio
LIÙ



Calaf acknowledges his gratitude to Liù for her faith and devotion, telling her that if he should fail to solve Turandot's riddles, she should erase all thought of him from her memory, but she must never abandon his old father. *Non piangere Liù!* "Do not cry, Liù."

Calaf: Non piangere. Liù!

A tempo rallentando
CALAF



Timur, Liù, and Turandot's Three Ministers again attempt to dissuade Calaf from his obsession to possess Turandot, but he remains impetuous, stubborn, intransigent, and undaunted: he is resolved and committed to follow his destiny; he will challenge Turandot, and he will win her love.

Intoxicated with his passion and confident of victory, he raises the hammer and strikes the great gong three times, the official challenge to Turandot's riddles. Turandot appears on her balcony, and scornfully and derisively signals that she accepts Calaf's challenge. The crowd, sensing an impending execution, erupts into a sadistic frenzy and fiendish delirium.

ACT II - Scene 1: A pavilion in the palace.

Turandot's three Ministers, Ping, Pang, and Pong, ponder the fate of the unknown Prince who has challenged Turandot, speculating whether they should prepare a victory celebration or a funeral. They express their agitation and discontent: Turandot's diabolical riddle contest has brought chaos to their kingdom; they had lived in peace for thousands of years until her cruel edicts overturned their lives; the fate of Turandot's challengers transformed their country into a "state butchery" with graveyards filled with Turandot's failed suitors.

The Ministers fantasize about escaping from their duties: they nostalgically long for the solitude of their respective homes, and pray that Turandot will soon find a lusty husband: if she is conquered by love, then peace will finally be restored to China.

ACT II - Scene 2: A large public square in front of the Imperial Palace.

An enormous crowd assembles: court dignitaries and the wise men who bear scrolls containing the answers to Turandot's riddles. Turandot's father, the Emperor Altoum, urges the unknown Prince to abandon his quest and save his life, but the impassioned Calaf remains undaunted, unable to be deterred from his obsession. A Mandarin announces Turandot's edict to the crowd, and then Princess Turandot appears to pose her riddles.

Turandot immediately proceeds to justify her convictions, defending her hatred and obsession for vengeance against all men: *In questa reggia*, "In this realm." She explains that many years ago, a terrible crime was committed, and its memory gnaws within her soul: her ancestress, the chaste Princess Lo-u-ling, was dethroned, raped, and killed by invading enemy Tatars. Turandot has resolved that it has become her solemn duty to avenge the evil committed against her ancestress, a revenge that she achieves by beheading her failed suitors.

Turandot: In questa reggia,

Molto lento
TURANDOT



In que - sta Reg - gia, or son mill' anni e mil - le
In this reign, thousands and thousands of years ago.....

Turandot defends her duty heroically and eloquently, but as she again recalls the horrible fate of Lo-u-ling, her agitation and anguish grow. She turns menacingly to Calaf, her voice rising in grandeur, and viciously denounces him, warning him that she represents divine justice: his adventure is futile and no one will ever possess her:

Mai nessun, nessun m'avrà!

"No one will ever possess me!"

Straniero. Non tentar la fortuna! Gli enigmi sono tre, la morte è una!

“Stranger, do not tempt fate! There are 3 riddles, but only one death!”

Calaf heroically contradicts her: he offers Turandot love; when Turandot discovers love, she will have learned the essence of life:

No, no!, Gli enigmi sono tre, una è la vita!
“There are three riddles: my offer is life!”

The Riddle Scene:

An eerie calm overcomes the crowd as Turandot prepares to pose the first riddle to the unknown Prince.

Turandot describes a ghost which rises each night to evoke humanity’s optimism, but at dawn, disappears to be reborn in the heart.

Nella cupa notte vola un fantasma iridiscente. Sale e dispiega l’ale sulla nera infinita umanità! Tutto il mondo l’invoca e tutto il mondo l’implora! Ma il fantasma sparisce coll’aurora per rinascere nel cuore! Ed ogni notte nasce ed ogni notte muore!

“An iridescent ghost flies in the dark night. It spreads its wings on humanity! The whole world invokes it, and the whole world implores it! But the ghost disappears with the dawn to be reborn in the heart! Every night it is born, and every night it dies.”

Calaf ponders the answer to the first riddle, and quickly responds:

Si! Rinasce! Rinasce e in esultanza mi porta via con sè, Turandot, la Speranza!

“Yes! It is reborn! Reborn in delight. Turandot, it is Hope!”

The wise men address their scrolls and confirm Calaf’s answer: “Hope.” Turandot, disturbed and alarmed, acknowledges Calaf’s answer, but scornfully and cynically comments that hope is a fantasy that always deludes humanity.

Turandot immediately proceeds to pose the second riddle:

Guizza al pari di fiamma, e non è fiamma! È tal volta delirio! È febbre d’impeto ardore! L’inerzia lo tramuta in un languore! Se ti perdi o trapassi, si raffredda! Se sogni la conquista avvampa, avvampa! Ha una voce che trepido tu ascolti, e del tramonto il vivido baglior!

“Though not a flame, it darts like a flame, grows chill with death, flares up when dreaming of victory, and has a glow like that of the setting sun?”

As Calaf ponders the answer to the second riddle, the Emperor and the crowd encourage him: “Do not lose! Your life is at stake!” Liù, anxious about the Prince’s fate, comments disappointingly how love has overpowered him.

Calaf replies:

Sì, Principessa! Avvampa e insieme langue, se tu mi guardi, nelle vene il sangue!

“Yes, Princess, it blazes and it languishes, and if you seek it, it is in your veins. It is Blood!”

The wise men confirm the answer: “Blood.” The crowd senses the Prince’s imminent victory and encourages him. Turandot reprimands them, commands them to silence, and then poses her final riddle:

Gelo che ti dà foco e dal tuo foco più gelo prende! Candida ed oscura! Se libero ti vuol, ti fa più servo Se per servo t'accetta, ti fa Re!

“The ice that scalds you and makes you icier! It is open yet obscure. If you want to be free from it, it makes you subservient. If you serve it, it accepts you and makes you a king!

Calaf hesitates and nervously contemplates his answer. Turandot stands before him and scorns him, commenting that he appears white with fear: she is self-assured and convinced that he will be unable to answer her final riddle.

Calaf rises with confidence and assurance, heroically calling out the answer to Turandot's final riddle: “Turandot.”

The wise men confirm the answer, and the crowd hails the victor with their blessing:

Ti sorrida la vita, ti sorrida l'amor.

“May life smile upon you! May love smile upon you!”

Turandot becomes distraught and hostile: she refuses to face reality and truth; she has been finally vanquished. She begs the Emperor not to force her to yield to the foreigner, but he reminds her that he is the guardian of their laws and her oath is sacred: *Il sacro giuramento*. Turandot must marry the stranger who has now solved her riddles.

Turandot again pleads with her father: “I am sacred, you cannot throw me to a stranger like a slave. I will die in shame.” She turns to the Prince in defiance: *Non sarò tua! No, non voglio!*, “I will never be yours, I do not wish it. No man will ever touch me!” Defeated, Turandot tells the Prince that even though he has been victorious and solved her riddles, he will never possess her soul. The Prince, with bold defiance, contradicts her: *No no Principessa altera, ti voglio tutt'ardente*

d'amor, “No, no, exalted Princess, I want you ardent in love.”

Calaf vows to transform Turandot’s lost pride into fervent love. He offers her a magnanimous counter-proposal: his own riddle, which, if Turandot can solve, will free her from her sacred pledge. Calaf proceeds to explain that Turandot does not know his name: *Il mio nome non sai*, “You do not know my name,” his words underscored with the signature “Love” music of the opera, a theme that now belongs to Calaf, and the music to be heard in Calaf’s *Nessun dorma* aria in Act III, as well as in the final transformation scene.

Love Music:

Moderto sostenuto



Calaf promises Turandot that if she learns his name before dawn, he will accept death by the executioner’s axe like all the other princes who preceded him.

Calaf’s dramatic challenge to Princess Turandot stimulates the crowd to excitement and expectation, and then they praise their Emperor: “Glory to the Emperor.”

Act III: Palace gardens

Music with exquisitely delicate harmonies portrays a sublime nocturnal atmosphere as voices echo throughout Peking proclaiming Turandot’s decree of torture and death: *Nessun dorma*, “No one may sleep,” until Turandot learns the name of the Prince.

Calaf has emerged triumphant from Turandot’s grueling test of the riddles: he is confident that she will never succeed in solving his riddle and discover his name. He

contemplates his forthcoming victory, reflecting with triumphant pride and passion how he will transform Turandot into a woman capable of warmth, tenderness, and unbounded love.

Nessun dorma becomes Calaf's celebration of victory: day will conquer night; male will conquer female: Calaf will conquer Turandot with his sublime mystery: love. At first he meditates on the terror Turandot has initiated in Peking. Then, in poetic words underscored by the "Love" music theme, he dreams of transforming Turandot with the power of his love: *Il mio mistero inchiuso in me, il nome mio nessun saprà*, "My mystery is locked within me, but I will place it on your lips, my kiss will break the silence." And finally, *All'alba vincero*, "In the morning, I will be victorious."

Calaf: *Nessun Dorma*

Andante sostenuto

CALAF



The Three Ministers suddenly interrupt Calaf. They have been commanded to save Turandot from her fate and persuade him to leave China: They offer him money, women, and an escape route to freedom. But Calaf declines: he wants only to possess Turandot.

Turandot's guards have captured Timur and Liù, both suspected of knowing the Prince's name, because they had been seen with him. Turandot appears and demands that Timur disclose the unknown Prince's name: Timur is silent and unyielding to her threats.

Liù, fearing Timur's safety, steps forward and declares that she alone knows the Prince's name. However, she affirms that even if tortured, she will refuse to reveal her secret, explaining that the power of her love for Calaf provides her with the strength to withstand torment and torture. Liù's steadfastness

momentarily stuns and bewilders Turandot, particularly when Liù predicts that one day Turandot too will become inflamed by love and desire: *amore*.

Turandot immediately reverts to a cold, inhuman, insensitive, and heartless woman: she orders her guards to torture Liù and force the secret from her. Fearing that she may yield under torture, Liù seizes a dagger from one of the guards and stabs herself: Liù sacrifices her life to save Calaf.

The tragic moment of Liù's death provides some of the finest musical inventions in the *Turandot* score: the music laments with a pathos that rises to great nobility and dignity, becoming even more exquisite through its rich and exotic harmonic coloring. In a crescendo of heart-wrenching emotion, Liù addresses her final farewell to Calaf, the man for whom she truly yearns and desires but has lost forever: *per non vederlo più*, "Never see you again."

The horrible death of Liù is intensely emotional and tragic, evoking from the on-looking crowd a profound sense of humanity, remorse, and pity. As all pray for forgiveness, Liù's body is carried away into the darkness of night, Calaf reacting to her death with powerful compassion, shock, disbelief, and uncontrollable emotion: *Tu sei morta, tu sei morta*, "You are dead! You are dead!" Timur denounces and curses Turandot, praying that the avenging spirits will exact justice on her for her cruelty and brutality.

Liù: Tu, che di gel sei cinta

Andantino mosso
LIÙ

Tu, che di gel sei cin - ta,
You, with the soul of ice.....

(Toscanini, at the premiere of *Turandot*, turned to the audience after Liù's death scene and said: *A questo punto, il maestro è morto*, "At this point, the maestro died." After Puccini

composed the music for Liù's death, he laid down his pen: it was Puccini's final music; his final poetry; his final artistic expression of sorrow, sacrifice, and death.)

Act III - Scene 2:

Calaf and Turandot are alone together. Turandot will become transformed from inhuman to human sensibilities: the Princess of ice will be raised to sublime consciousness and discover her soul, ultimately, aspiring to the nobility of love.

Calaf, reeling from the brutal horror of Liù's death, reproaches Turandot for her cruelty:

Principessa di morte, Principessa di gelo. Dal tuo tragico cielo scendi giù sulla terra. Ah! Solleva quel velo. Guarda, guarda crudele. Quel purissimo sangue che fu sparso per te.

“Princess of death, Princess of ice. From your tragic “heaven” come down to the earth. Lift your veil. Look at the noble and pure blood that has been poured because of you.”

Turandot commands Calaf to leave her. She defends herself as a god, an untouchable, and a sacred daughter of Heaven who is pure and free: he may lift her veil, but her heart and soul are divine and transcendent: *Non profanarmi, è sacrilegio*. “Don't touch me, it is a sacrilege.”

But Calaf is undaunted and cannot be deterred from his passion for Turandot: impetuously, he takes her into his arms, overcomes her resistance, and kisses her.

There is a pause and an eerie silence as a sublime serenity overcomes the scene. Turandot seems dazed and stunned, and in an almost dream-like stupor, asks Calaf: “What have you done to me?” Turandot, unable to

understand that she has been defeated by Calaf's ardor, despairingly comments: "I am lost now."

Calaf's kiss has transformed Turandot and broke the spell of the "icy" Princess. At first, Turandot reflects on her defeat: *La mia gloria è finita*. "My glory is finished," but Calaf reassures her, translating conquest into triumph: *No, essa incomincia*, "No, it has just begun."

Turandot commands Calaf to leave: he must ask nothing more and take the mystery of his identity with him. Calaf refuses: he has triumphed and he wants to possess his victory prize. Calaf also wants Turandot to know him: he now feels compelled to reveal his name to her.

Il mio mistero? Non ne ho più! Sei mia. Tu che tremi se ti sfioro. Tu che sbianchi se ti bacio, puoi perdermi se vuoi. Il mio nome è la vita insieme ti dono. Io son Calaf, figlio di Timur.

"My mystery I will no longer hide. You are mine. You have trembled from my kiss. You can lose me if you wish. My name is life, and I give it to you. I am Calaf, son of Timur."

Calaf has placed his destiny at Turandot's mercy: she now possesses his secret – his name - and has the power to destroy him if she wishes. But Turandot has been transformed by Calaf's kiss: she has discovered love and responds to Calaf ecstatically.

Turandot:

So il tuo nome!

"I know your name!"

Calaf:

La mia gloria è il tuo amplesso! La mia vita è il tuo bacio!

"My glory is your embrace. My life is your kiss."

Turandot:

Ecco l'ora! È l'ora della prova!

“Here is the moment of my proof.

Calaf:

Non la temo!

“I have no fear.”

Turandot:

Ah Calaf, davanti al popolo con me!

“Come with me in front of the people.”

Calaf:

Hai vinto tu!

“You have won.”

As dawn approaches, Turandot leads Calaf before the Emperor, the court, and the people, to announce her victory – and Calaf’s destiny: she proclaims that at last she knows the stranger’s name.

Turandot turns to Calaf, shaking and trembling with incomprehensible and mysterious emotions, and then addresses her father, Emperor Altoum:

Padre augusto. Conosco il nome dello straniero!

Il suo nome è Amor!

“August Father, I now know the name of the stranger.

His name is Love.”

The jubilant crowd acclaims the two lovers, the underlying music, the “Love Theme”: the victory of love.

Amor! O Sole! Vita! Eternità! Luce del mondo è amore! Ride e canta nel Sole l'infinita nostra felicità! Gloria a te! Gloria a te!

“Love! Sun! Eternity! The light of the world is love. Smile and sing in the brightness, the eternity of our happiness.”

The power of love has triumphed and conquered Turandot!

Puccini.....and Turandot

In the early 1920s, as Giacomo Puccini approached the composition of what would become his last opera, *Turandot*, he had achieved universal acclaim and had become recognized as the foremost Italian opera composer in the world.

Puccini's illustrious opera composing career began with *Le Villi* (1884), followed by *Edgar* (1889): both were monstrous failures. In 1893, the young composer was on the verge of accepting his destiny as a failed opera composer, but his mentor, the renowned publisher Giulio Ricordi, confirmed his faith in his protégé and urged him to compose an opera based on the Abbé Prévost's novel *Manon Lescaut*. The opera became Puccini's first great success, his muse and inspiration, and the moment from which his unique compositional style and indelible musical signature began to flourish.

Afterwards, one successful opera followed another: *La Bohème* (1896); *Tosca* (1900); *Madama Butterfly* (1904); *La Fanciulla del West* (1910); *La Rondine* (1917); *Il Trittico* consisting of *Il Tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi* (1918); and *Turandot*, premiering in 1926, two year after his death.

Puccini was the last of the great Italian romantic opera composers, far outshining his contemporaries, Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Giordano, Cilea, and Ponchielli. His death in 1924 unofficially ended the "Golden Age of Opera," and certainly, nobody since him has managed to approach his impact on the opera stage. Dr. Mosco Carner, a renowned Puccini biographer, commented: "While the basis of Verdi's operas is a battle cry; of Puccini it is a mating call."

Verdi had dominated Italian opera for over a half century; nevertheless, in style and temperament, Puccini was not Verdi, but he did indeed earn the austere mantle as Verdi's heir: he successfully continued and perpetuated Italian opera's central focus on voice, melody, and lyricism, all with music that bore his own unique style and signature. At the same time, his operas were powerful music dramas, each possessing a remarkable and masterful integration of its underlying text and music.

Puccini's musico-dramatic style largely reflects the naturalistic movement of the Italian *giovane scuola*, the "Young School" of late 19th and early 20th century Italian composers who espoused the new genre called *verismo*, or Realism. Throughout his entire career, he identified himself with *verismo*, what he called the *stile mascagnano*, the Mascagni style that first erupted in Italy in the latter's phenomenally successful one-act opera, *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890).

Verismo opera subjects characterized raw human nature with swift dramatic action, its realism a welcome antidote to the romantic melodramas which had dominated opera stories during most of the 19th century. Verdi, in his search for more profound characterizations, certainly may have established the precursors for *verismo*: his evil yet loving, ambivalent title character in *Rigoletto* (1851), and the avenging, haggard gypsy, Azucena, in *Il Trovatore* (1853). In France, *verismè*'s passionate confrontations, involving jealousy, betrayal, revenge, and murder, was introduced with Bizet's *Carmen* (1875).

In the *verismo* genre, primal passions became the subject of the action: its characterizations portrayed the latent animal, the uncivilized savage, and the barbarian side of man's nature, a confirmation of Darwin's theory that man evolved from primal beast. In *verismo*, no subject was too mundane, no subject too harsh, and no subject too ugly. As such, *verismo* plots dealt with torrid passions involving sex, seduction, revenge, betrayal, jealousy, murder, and death. In *verismo* and its successors, modernity and film noir genres, man was portrayed as irrational, brutal, crude, cruel, and demonic: death became the ultimate consummation of desire, and good did not necessarily triumph over evil. In many respects, *verismo* represented an artistic backlash to the Enlightenment's reason, and Romanticism's freedom and sentimentality: in *verismo*, man was portrayed as primordial, a violent and savage creature of instinct.

Puccini's art exploited human pain and suffering, and he translated them musically with all of the passions and pathos of his contemporary *verismo* genre: *Manon Lescaut*'s tragedy evolves from excessive passions when emotions overpower reason; *La Bohème* deals with the cruelty of fate in Mimi's death; *Tosca* exposes sadistic violence, torture, and murder; *Madama Butterfly* explores heartless inhumanity

leading to suicide; and in *Turandot*, Liù's cruel torture and ultimate suicide evokes pathos, and even a catharsis. Cruel deaths and a deep sense of melancholy pervade all of Puccini's operatic characterizations: his music dramas were inspired by human despair; he ingeniously underscored *verismo* passions with his profound lyricism.

Puccini generally composed his music in harmonies which emphasized his 19th century roots: most of his music is written in the diatonic (whole tone) scale, and only rarely and occasionally did he make forays into dissonance.

Nevertheless, he could not be totally oblivious to his contemporaries who were busily exploring new possibilities of harmonic expression: Debussy (*Pelléas et Mélisande*) was experimenting with Impressionism, attempting to create visual images of subjects through music; Schoenberg (*Moses and Aron*) invented atonalism with new harmonies that avoided any tonal center or key relationship; and Richard Strauss (*Salome* and *Elektra*), was using Expressionism in his goal to translate subconscious states into the musical language.

In *Turandot*, Puccini unquestionably advanced beyond any of his previous works in terms of harmonic adventurism. At times, the score contains huge dissonances, and it has been suggested that some of these harmonic patterns could well have emanated from the influence of his renowned contemporary, Igor Stravinsky, the composer of the innovative and pioneering work, *Rites of Spring*. In *Turandot*, dissonant harmonic elements are intentionally incorporated in order to create specific effects: there is bitonality in its opening chords when two unrelated keys, C-sharp major and D minor, are superimposed to simulate the executioner's axe falling: an evocation of fear, barbaric cruelty, and grotesqueness.

Puccini was a master at capturing exotic idioms. In *Madama Butterfly*, its collision of Eastern and Western cultures – Japanese and American – provided him with a magnificent opportunity for musical invention. In *Butterfly*, he succeeded in brilliantly portraying the contrast of cultures with an ingenious interplay of oriental and western music. Likewise, the Chinese ambience of *Turandot* inspired a wealth

of oriental coloring that is musically and texturally distinct; its orchestration masterful, and at times, to achieve desired effects, augmented by the use of 23 different percussion instruments.

Puccini spiced his *Turandot* score with authentic Chinese as well as self invented oriental melodies and idioms, primitive harmonies, and barbaric rhythms, all fused with the composer's own unique orchestral coloring and textures. There are authentic Chinese themes that were apparently adapted from a Chinese music box: the *Moo-Lee-Wha* folksong melody that signifies the "official" Turandot in Act I; and fragments of the Chinese National anthem that underscore the music of the three Ministers when they try to dissuade Calaf in Act I.

Leitmotifs, literally leading motives, are musical themes or melodic fragments identifying persons and ideas: leitmotifs play a prominent role in all of Puccini's operas, but they are never developed or woven with the systematic symphonic grandeur associated which Wagner perfected. In Puccini, leitmotifs serve to provide cohesion, emotion, and reminiscence, their prominence only to serve as a technique to be exploited for dramatic rather than symphonic effect. Calaf's "Love Theme," the signature music of the opera, is a leitmotif that is first heard as a musical underscore to his counter-challenge to Turandot, again in the aria, *Nessun Dorma*, and again in the finale. Like his predecessor Bellini (*I Puritani*), musical motives associated with heroines are generally heard before they are seen, a brilliant dramatic technique witnessed in the heroine's entrances in *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Manon Lescaut*, *La Bohème*, and the first act entrance of *Turandot*.

Puccini wrote masterfully for the voice. His major strength was his invention of lush and arching melodic lines that possess a sensuous, melting lyricism. Likewise, his orchestral writing possesses an elegance and highly personal lyric signature that is saturated with incomparable sweetness, elegance, and gentleness, and a profound poignancy.

Turandot's opening aria in Act II, *In questa reggia*, is a grueling test for singers: there are wide, leaping intervals, a *tessitura* that involves a wide range between low to high notes. Indeed, the aria's many high notes, its B's and C's, must resound and pierce through a gigantic orchestra, as well as score marked

with an abundance of *ff*'s and *fff*'s.

In Calaf's third act aria, *Nessun dorma*, the composer sparkles in his musico-dramatic genius, brilliantly and effectively capturing the opera's essential conflicts and tensions as Calaf intones his final dream of victory: *all'alba vincero*, "In the morning, I will be victorious," his *vincero*, repeated three times as it builds to its spectacular climax.

In Liù's music, the composer bares his soul for the character who is the true Puccinian heroine in the opera. Much of her music is written in pentatonic harmony, the oriental five-tone scale; nevertheless, it possesses that special Puccinian signature: there is an intense sense of pathos in Liù's Act I aria, *Signore, ascolta*, "Sir, please listen," and in her Act II aria, *Tu che di gel sei cinta*, "You of ice," her revelation that she can withstand torture because she is fortified by her intense love for Calaf.

Puccini possessed acute dramatic instincts which never failed him: he was truly a master stage-craftsman with a consummate knowledge and pronounced sensitivity to the demands of the theater. He well demonstrated his ingenuity for spectacular stage effects in the third act roll-call of the women in *Manon Lescaut*, in the first act *Te Deum* in *Tosca*, and, of course, in the spectacular *Riddle Scene* in the second act of *Turandot*.

Turandot's choral writing is vast, certainly more complex than in any previous work, and in that context, it is both exception and exceptional. Puccini was not a composer of ambitious works on the grand opera scale, honestly admitting often that he was not a creator of stage spectacle in the manner of Meyerbeer, Verdi, or Wagner. He commented that "the only music I can make is of small things," acknowledging that his talent and temperament were not suited to works of large design, or even of portrayals of romantic heroism.

Indeed, Puccini's operatic subjects deal with the simple world of real people. *Manon Lescaut*, *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*, are not portrayals of kings, nobles, gods, or heroes, but rather, an adherence to *verismo* and realism in their portrayal of ordinary people, and the intimacy of countless little humdrum details in their everyday lives. Certainly, *La Bohème* and *Madama Butterfly* epitomize

Puccini's world of "small things," their grandeur not of supercharged passions evolving from world-shattering events, but rather of moments of tender human emotion and sentiment.

Puccini had a rare gift for evoking a profound sense of realism in his music: he brilliantly captured the exotic oriental ambience in *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*; the sounds of the church bells in Act III of *Tosca*; the ship's sirens in *Il Tabarro*; the crackling of the fire in *La Bohème* as Rodolfo's manuscript burns; the effects when Colline tumbles down the hallway stairs; and the falling snowflakes of winter in Act III. Claude Debussy, no friend of the contemporary school of Italian opera, was prompted to confess that he knew of no one who had so realistically described in music Louis-Philippe's Paris "as well as Puccini in *La Bohème*."

Puccini's operas contain a perfect balance between realism and romanticism, and at times, between comedy and pathos, and he had few equals in inventing music dramas portraying intimate humanity. That special intimacy evolves from his personal lyricism composed for both voice and orchestra, a style that is saturated with richness and elegance, and an outstanding combination of instrumental color and harmonic texture.

His lyricism is profound: his memorable melodies have become endlessly haunting: one leaves a Puccini opera performance, but the music never leaves the listener. Puccini was, above all, a master of music drama, a meticulous craftsman who integrated his text and music into a seamless, single conceptual unity that proves beyond doubt that he was a supreme master of the operatic canon.

Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806) was an Italian playwright renowned for his dramatized fairytales which attempted to revive the failing theatrical style of the *commedia dell'arte*, "Comedy of Masks." The *commedia dell'arte* genre began in the Renaissance: it was a form of improvised comedy in which actors wore masks, and were disguised to avoid recognition; their theatrics presented antagonistic satire and comic situations which parodied and lampooned contemporary customs, political, and social

institutions. *Commedia dell'arte* nurtured the *Intermezzi*, comedy plays that were performed during interludes of theatrical plays. Both genres became the underlying foundations for Italian comic opera, or *opera buffa*.

Gozzi's fairy tale play, *Turandotte* (1772), had achieved much popular success: Schiller rewrote it into a serious drama, and later featured it in the newly conceived German National Theatre at Weimar. The play would later become the subject of operas by Busoni (1917), and of course, Puccini (1926). Wagner's *Die Feen* (1833), "The Fairies," and Prokofief's *The Love of Three Oranges* (1921), were based on another Gozzi dramatic fable, *La Donna Serpente*.

As early as 1919, Puccini considered Schiller's dramatization of Gozzi's *Turandotte* an excellent subject for an opera. However, he was in conflict with the satirical elements of the story, in particular, the proper dramatic treatment of the three "masks," or Turandot's three Ministers: the traditional *commedia del'arte* roles. Puccini dubbed the "mask" characters "these clowns," characters who did not directly move the action, but instead indulged in cynical, satirical, and, at times, obscene and vulgar commentary. He had difficulty in envisioning them in his dramatic conception of the work, and seriously considered eliminating them.

Nevertheless, he faced the challenge and persevered to find a way to effectively deal with Turandot's three Ministers. Ultimately, he decided to "modernize and bring human warmth to the old cardboard figures," admonishing his librettists, Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, that the Ministers were to be ambivalent and unobtrusive: they should portray a combination of philosophers and clowns who would occasionally lighten the dramatic tension of the story with their humor. In the end, Puccini's astounding theatrical adroitness transformed Gozzi's farcical and satirical "Mask" characters, Ping - the Grand Chancellor, Pang - the General Purveyor, and Pong - the Chief Cook, into Turandot's creatures: they became ambivalent characters possessing a magnificent blend of both humane as well as inhumane attributes.

Turandot is ostensibly a romantic fairy tale. The hero, Calaf, persists in wooing Turandot, a woman unknown to him, but whose physical beauty has infatuated and hypnotized him: she is a cruel woman of whom he knows nothing, and whose inhumane actions should logically prompt his antipathy. Nevertheless, Calaf is that classic protagonist, a man of zealous passion who becomes a victim of emotions that overpower reason.

Calaf persists relentlessly in challenging Turandot. He ultimately transforms a woman possessing obsessive male-hatred into a woman yearning for man's love. Calaf is an archetype representing the nobility of love; Turandot, equally archetypal, is the woman he transforms and who capitulates; in the end, it is a classic fairy tale with a happy ending and a powerful human lesson about love.

But *Turandot* is a Puccini opera, and the composer was intuitively compelled to yield to his muse and inspiration: he created Liù, the slave-girl, whose tragic death eventually overwhelms the story; Puccini's musical pen transformed Gozzi's original fairy-tale and fable into a poignant tragedy.

Puccini's muse evolved from stories about real people - *verismo* people - from everyday life: the flower girl Mimi in *La Bohème*, the geisha in *Madama Butterfly*, Georgetta in *Il Tabarro*, and the courtesan, Manon Lescaut. And in terms of the composer's predilection for exotic ambience, the *Turandot* story indeed provided a picturesque locale, just as *La Bohème*'s Paris, *Tosca*'s Rome, *Madama Butterfly*'s Nagasaki, and the American west in *Girl of the Golden West*.

However, *Turandot* was certainly vastly apart and largely atypical of themes he dealt with in previous Puccini operas. *Turandot* was a fairy tale story with mythological overtones: Puccini, unlike Wagner, had never tackled myths, even though his earlier opera, *Le Villi*, "The Witches," indeed contained mythological phantasmagoria.

Underlying the *Turandot* fable is the mythological battle of the sexes, a classic struggle imbedded with tension and conflict in which the male - the opera's hero Calaf - relentlessly pursues the female: the female - the opera's heroine Turandot - becomes the target of the hunt.

Turandot is an obsessed woman who is propelled by a passionate hatred and fear of men that evolves into an uncompromising need for revenge. To resist conquest and subjugation by the male, she erects the barrier of her three riddles, fearful and impregnable obstacles that she believes will protect her. Until her final transformation, Turandot is brutal and harsh, a grotesque character with the aura of a warped heroine. Nevertheless, she is an archetypal character, duly suited to be admitted into opera's Rogues Gallery of female monsters: Kundry in Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, Richard Strauss' *Salome* and *Elektra*, and Alban Berg's *Lulu*.

According to modern interpretations, particularly those of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, myths yield inner secret meanings from our collective unconscious: eternal truths that are uncorrupted by history, and events and happenings that occurred long ago and in distant places; events that occur within us over and over again, almost nightly in our dreams or in our subconscious.

In traditional mythic tales, the male embarks on an initiation rite in which he must break from the mother (nature) bonds, and seek the father (wisdom). The essence of his progression toward maturity is that his levels of awareness and consciousness are elevated: he develops reasoning power and wisdom, and he is then capable of overcoming the threatening female. In Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Prince Tamino's archetypal journey represents a classic male initiation rite: he successfully conquers the ordeals of fire and water laid before him and ultimately achieves wisdom. Similarly, Wagner's Siegfried in the *Ring* operas embarks on a journey toward maturity.

Conversely, in myths, the maturing female realizes her vulnerability and battles the male with unyielding fervor. In traditional Amazon myths or the Sirens in Homer's *Odyssey*, a defeated queen is forced to marry a conquering king. The vanquished female becomes combative and belligerent, develops an unrelenting hatred of the male, and justifies her obsession for revenge with retrospectives of violence suffered by an ancestor at the hands of overpowering males.

In Gozzi's original fable, Turandot's male hatred is a *fait accompli*, its underlying rationale or justification never explained. Puccini, an adroit dramatic craftsman with acute theatrical instincts, demanded that his story

provide a more finite explanation for his heroine's malice and animosity. He and his librettists invented Turandot's ancestress, Lo-u-Ling, a character who does not appear in the Gozzi original, but whose existence provided the historical justification for Turandot's male-hatred. Turandot explains in her opening aria, *In questa reggia*, "In this realm," that Lo-u-Ling was raped and murdered during a Tatar invasion, and it has become her duty and obsession to avenge the cruelty exacted upon her by males.

But another factor feeds Turandot's resentment to the male. In eastern cultural traditions, the male-dominated society considered women inferior beings, at times slaves, and at times only a means for the gratification of man's sensual pleasure. Again, in Turandot's monologue, *In questa reggia*, she defends her gender against male domination, the righteousness of her convictions, and justifies her outrageous decrees.

The *Turandot* story also reconstructs the ancient mythological legends in which the desired female creates a mortal contest, vowing to yield only to the man who proves himself superior to her in a physical battle. Puccini's *Turandot* adds a subtle twist to the eternal battle between the sexes: the struggle becomes a contest of wits rather than physical power; the heroine has elevated her terms and conditions to a high intellectual plane.

Opera is best when it exploits fanatic passions, its inherent art form combining the grandeur of prose with the emotive power of music. The *Turandot* fairy tale story is saturated with zealous explosions of both love as well as hate. Puccini was fascinated by the paradox, realizing that love and hate are contradictions, but emotions which incite complementary passions.

The entire *Riddle scene* confrontation portrays a tension between Turandot's obsessive male-hatred, and Calaf's relentless aspirations for love, both concepts expressed with equal heroic grandeur and enormous power and passion. The failure to solve Turandot's riddles results in death, but after solving the riddles, the victorious Calaf is undaunted in his desire to bring life to Turandot: the essence of life is love, and Calaf becomes obsessed to awaken her conscience to love's sublime power. Nevertheless, Calaf threatens Turandot's womanhood: she fears giving

love as well as receiving love; she fears surrender to those essential human needs for feeling warmth and affection. That contrast between Calaf's desire, and Turandot's inhuman coldness, is the primary focus of the story: both protagonists are unrelenting, and even fanatic, in their individual passions; love and hate.

Gozzi's original fairy tale was invested with a moral theme in which the powerful nobility of true love was portrayed as the most exalted of virtues, humanity's ultimate aspiration that prompted courage, loyalty, fortitude in suffering, and self-sacrifice. Calaf embodies those lofty spiritual virtues with courage and magnanimity: he offers to release Turandot from her pledge of marriage by posing his own riddle, even though he had been victorious in her contest.

Puccini exploits those emotions and passions in the grandiose climax of the *Riddle Scene*. Turandot, beside herself in fear and defeat, pleads with her father, the Emperor Altoum, to reverse the sacred laws, and not cast his daughter to the victor like a slave. Calaf responds with an explosion of fervent passion, his desire to convert her will, expressed profoundly and dramatically when Puccini's optional high C climaxes the prose: *No, No Principessa altera, ti voglio tutt'ardente amor!*, "No, No, exalted Princess. I want you ardent in love."

Turandot beheads her failed suitors, a revenge for which she feels neither guilty, cruel, brutal, nor sadistic. But after Calaf is victorious in answering her riddles, and then poses one of his own, Turandot proceeds to terrorize Peking to learn the "unknown Prince's" name, an edict equally as cruel and barbaric as her executions of failed suitors: Turandot is in fear and has become even more obsessed and determined to destroy Calaf, a continuation of a ferocious sex-war in which the passions of love and hate are elevated to a somber grandeur.

But it is in the final scene in which the inhuman and impersonal figure of Turandot, almost an inaccessible "Goddess of Destruction," is transformed by Calaf's undaunted love from the "woman of ice" into a warm, loving, and affectionate woman. Turandot is converted, her ultimate transformation a transcendental moment in which she discovers her soul. Calaf's kiss becomes that sublime, transforming magic: Turandot's seething passions of hatred immediately

dissolve and become transformed into passions, yearnings, and desires for love.

Puccini's specific objective was to depict the transformation of Turandot from a cold, brutal, abstract figure of legend, into a real and warm human being: a woman transformed because she discovered the nobility of love. Puccini, again the quintessential dramatist, invented the final twist for the finale of the opera story in which the Prince himself discloses his identity to Turandot, thus placing himself at Turandot's mercy. It is indeed a glorious dramatic moment in the finale when Turandot, now possessing the unknown Prince's name and, therefore, the power to destroy him, proclaims to the Emperor and her people that she is happily vanquished: her defeat transformed into victory as she announces *il suo nome è amor*, "His name is love."

Turandot was a difficult opera for Puccini: the brutal persona of its title character did not fit into his typical pantheon of sympathetic or *verismo* heroines: those essentially uncomplicated characters such as *La Bohème's* Mimi, or *Madama Butterfly's* Cio-Cio-San. For *Turandot* to become a *real* Puccini opera, the composer invented that true Puccinian-type character who would inspire that special poignancy in his musical inventions as he exploited her pain, agony, and suffering. Liù became that character: a gentle and kind slave-girl, self-less and self-sacrificing in her dedication to love, but a Puccinian heroine whom the composer could love, and because of her faults, submit to agony as he destroyed her.

Liù's ultimate tragic fate, as well as that of all Puccini's heroines, is a reflection of the composer's inner psychological conflicts; mundane and erotic love were sins, and, therefore, a tragic guilt; it was only sacred love that was pure and worthy.

Puccini's father died, leaving his 33 year old wife with a family of seven children: five girls and two sons. Puccini adored his mother, who single-handedly persevered in rearing her children in the midst of a fatherless family that was constantly in financial difficulty. His love for his mother became almost archetypal in its reverence. Subconsciously, his veneration of his mother transformed into a raging mother com-

plex in which he unwittingly condemned mundane love, and elevated his exalted mother's virtues to near sainthood.

He confronted his mother complex by becoming addicted to prostitutes and participating in a whole series of sado-masochistic love affairs: initially he would possess and conquer these women, but later, in order to vilify them and liberate himself from his sense of guilt and sin, he would denigrate and virtually destroy them (The Madonna-whore syndrome). Mundane love, physical and erotic love, became the ultimate sin, an affront to the pure and exalted love he bore for his mother. Puccini's heroines oppose the saintly mother image: those heroines are simple, uncomplicated women whose mundane love he subconsciously condemned: a sinful love for which they are subjected to the typical Puccinian punishment of a cruel and agonizing death: the tormented and pathetically suffering deaths he afflicted on Manon, Mimi, and Butterfly, and, of course, Liù.

Puccini was also possessed by uncontrollable inner demons, what he admittedly called his personal neurosis and destructive inclinations; a sadistic streak, and a nasty Neronic imagination. Indeed, his invention of the Liù character kindled his fundamentally "tragic" imagination; her torture and the pathos of her death fired his cruel musical engines, as did Cavaradossi's torment in *Tosca*, Giorgetta's brutal murder in *Il Tabarro*, and Butterfly's suicide.

Nevertheless, Liù's presence served to enlarge both the emotional and musical scope of the opera appreciably: an opportunity for Puccini's signature music as he exploited human agony and suffering. Liù secretly loves Calaf because he smiled upon her in the past: she has dedicated and sacrificed her whole life and being to him and his father. She dies by her own hand while averting Turandot's torture, but she dies with the secret of Calaf's name undisclosed; her unbounded love and loyalty, and her eventual martyrdom, becoming an act of pure self-sacrifice that becomes both poignant and heroic.

Puccini punishes Liù, not unlike Manon, Mimi, or Butterfly, as retribution for her "guilt" for having loved a man entirely out of her own sphere: her passions of love should have been directed toward a more exalted spiritual ideal. Nevertheless, Liù becomes the sacrificing woman, her tragic death advancing the dra-

matic course of the story by enabling Calaf to win Turandot and “live happily ever after”: that sacrifice, an element of the story which German Romanticists adopted with a passion. Puccini’s *Turandot* became more famous in Germany before it had achieved worldwide acclaim. As such, Liù was a soul-sister of Wagner’s sacrificing and redeeming heroines, those romanticized *woman of the future*, *ewige weibliche*, or *femme eterne*, saviors and redeemers of man’s narcissism and egoism.

Nevertheless, the fairy tale happy ending of the opera was perilous for Puccini; Liù’s tragic death became anticlimactic, and he exhausted years pondering an appropriate ending for the opera following the death of Liù. Ironically, after he completed the music for perhaps his most quintessentially agonizing death scene, Liù’s death, Puccini himself died, and the final scene was completed posthumously from his sketches by his pupil, Franco Alfano, under the direction of Arturo Toscanini.

Turandot is the swan-song from one of the world’s greatest and most popular opera composers, perhaps his *magnum opus*. It possesses a remarkable blend of heroic grandeur, exoticism, and romantic, poignant sentimentalism; an incredible operatic masterpiece with a magnificent combination of powerful drama, and musically, lush and arching melody, rich harmonies, and a colorful orchestration.

Turandot is a music drama *par excellence*, Italian to the core in its lyric intensity, and a fitting work to mark the end of the great “Golden Age of Opera” that had dominated most of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

It was Puccini’s last creation, an ingenious work with unrivalled beauty and dramatic power: an overwhelming operatic experience. •