

Turandot

GIACOMO PUCCINI 1926

APPROXIMATE PERIOD OF WORK: 130 minutes

SUNG IN ITALIAN

Among all Puccini's successes, Turandot holds a special place. This last opera, which remained unfinished, concentrates all the master's art and can be considered his greatest masterpiece. The opera calls for the greatest voices to do justice to divinely written arias as famous as "Nessun dorma".

When he died in 1924, Puccini left this opera, written in 1762, unfinished. It was inspired by a Chinese tale by Carlo Gozzi. It is a mature work that testifies to its composer's musical mastery. Puccini successfully blended burlesque elements with the three masks (Ping, Pang, Pong), heroic elements, sentimental intrigue (with Liù, a typically "Puccinian" heroine) and a touch of the exotic.

The latter is characterised by the appearance of Chinese musical themes and the use of the pentatonic scale.

It was the great conductor Arturo Toscanini who chose the composer Franco Alfano to complete the score. However, at the premiere at La Scala in Milan on 25 April 1926, the conductor put down his baton at the last note written by Puccini without playing Alfano's addition. The opera was premiered in its entirety at the second performance.



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THE PLOT

In Peking, in the emperor's palace, in legendary times, the princess Turandot requires her suitors to solve three riddles. If they fail, they are beheaded. Prince Calaf, in love with Turandot, tries his luck with the help of his faithful servant Liù. He conceals his identity and presents himself as an unknown prince.

Act 1

The opera opens with the execution of an unfortunate suitor, a Persian prince. In the crowd, the former king of Tartary, Timur, miraculously finds the son he thought dead, Calaf. Calaf is immediately seduced by the beauty of the Chinese princess, who appears on the balcony. He decides to take part in the trials, despite the warnings of his slave Liù, who secretly loves him.

Act 2

Ping, Pang and Pong, referring to the whims of the princess, lament the fate of China. They hope she will finally find true love. Turandot reveals why she subjects her suitors to these inhuman trials. Thousands of years ago, her ancestor Lou-Ling was raped and murdered by a barbarian king, and she wishes to avenge this affront. Calaf solves the three riddles, but the princess wants to break her oath. Calaf is generous and offers her a test: she must discover his identity before sunrise.

Act 3

The whole palace is trying to discover the identity of the suitor. Timur and Liù are arrested and questioned. To save her master, Liù pretends to be the only one who knows Calaf's name. She fears revealing the truth under torture and commits suicide. Calaf reproaches the princess for her cruelty. She confesses that she has loved him from the very first moment and he reveals his identity to her. In the morning, the princess declares that she has solved the riddle: the mysterious prince's name is "love".

MAIN ROLES

Turandot, princess (soprano)

Ping, chancellor (baritone)

Calaf, unknown prince (tenor)

Pang, provider (tenor)

Liù, young slave (soprano)

Pong, head of the kitchen (tenor)

Timur, Calaf's father (bass)

Altoum, emperor (tenor)

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