Giacomo Puccini

Turandot

Opera in three acts
Libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni

Monday, January 7, 2013, 7:30–10:35 pm

The production of Turandot is made possible by a generous gift from Mrs. Donald D. Harrington

The revival of this production was made possible by a gift from The Dr. M. Lee Pearce Foundation
The Metropolitan Opera
2012–13 Season

The 295th Metropolitan Opera performance of

Giacomo Puccini’s

Turandot

Conductor
Dan Ettinger

Turandot
Iréne Theorin

Liù
Hibla Gerzmava

Calàf
Walter Fraccaro

Timur
Samuel Ramey

Emperor Altoum
Bernard Fitch

Ping
Dwayne Croft**

Pang
Tony Stevenson**

Pong
Eduardo Valdes

Three Masks
Davis Robertson
Andrew Robinson
Amir Levy

Mandarin
Ryan Speedo Green*

Executioner
Antonio de Marco

Prince of Persia
Sasha Semin

Handmaidens
Anne Nonnemacher
Mary Hughes

Temptresses
Linda Gelinas
Oriada Islami Prifti
Rachel Schuette
Sarah Weber-Gallo

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Synopsis

Act I
Outside the Imperial Palace in Peking

Intermission  (AT APPROXIMATELY 8:05 PM)

Act II
SCENE 1 The apartments of Ping, Pang, and Pong
SCENE 2 Before the emperor’s throne

Intermission  (AT APPROXIMATELY 9:35 PM)

Act III
SCENE 1 The Imperial Gardens
SCENE 2 Before the emperor’s throne

Act I
Outside the Imperial Palace a mandarin reads an edict to the crowd: any prince seeking to marry the princess Turandot must answer three riddles. If he fails, he will die. The most recent suitor, the Prince of Persia, is to be executed at the moon’s rising. Among the onlookers are the slave girl Liù, her aged master, and the young Calàf, who recognizes the old man as his long lost father, Timur, vanquished King of Tartary. When Timur reveals that only Liù has remained faithful to him, Calàf asks why. She replies that once, long ago, Calàf smiled at her. The mob cries for blood but greets the rising moon with a sudden fearful silence. When the Prince of Persia is led to his execution, the crowd calls upon the princess to spare him. Turandot appears, and with a contemptuous gesture orders that the execution proceed. As the victim’s death cry is heard from the distance, Calàf, transfixed by the beauty of the unattainable princess, strides to the gong that announces a new suitor. Suddenly Turandot’s three ministers, Ping, Pang, and Pong, appear to discourage him. Timur and the tearful Liù also beg him not to risk his life. Calàf tries to comfort her but then strikes the gong and calls Turandot’s name.

Act II
Inside the palace, Ping, Pang, and Pong lament Turandot’s bloody reign, praying that love will conquer her heart and restore peace. The three let their thoughts wander to their peaceful country homes, but the noise of the people gathering to hear Turandot question the new challenger calls them back to reality.
In the throne room before the assembled court, the old emperor asks Calàf to reconsider, but he will not be dissuaded. Turandot enters and describes how her beautiful ancestor, Princess Lou-Ling, was abducted and killed by a conquering prince. In revenge, she has turned against men and determined that none shall ever possess her. Facing Calàf, she poses her first question: What is born each night and dies each dawn? “Hope,” Calàf answers, correctly. Turandot continues: What flickers red and warm like a flame, yet is not a flame? “Blood,” Calàf replies after a moment’s thought. Shaken, Turandot delivers the third riddle: What is like ice but burns? Tense silence prevails until Calàf triumphantly cries, “Turandot!” The crowd erupts in joy, and the princess vainly begs her father not to give her to the stranger. Hoping to win her love, Calàf offers Turandot a challenge of his own: if she can learn his name by dawn, he will forfeit his life.

Act III
At night in the Imperial Gardens, Calàf hears a proclamation: on pain of death no one in Peking shall sleep until Turandot learns the stranger’s name. Calàf is certain of his victory, but Ping, Pang, and Pong try to bribe him to leave the city. As the fearful mob threatens him to learn his name, soldiers drag in Liù and Timur. Calàf tries to convince the crowd that neither of them knows his secret. When Turandot appears, commanding Timur to speak, Liù replies that she alone knows the stranger’s identity and will never reveal it. She is tortured but remains silent. Impressed by such fortitude, Turandot asks Liù’s secret. It is love, she replies. When the soldiers intensify the torture, Liù tells Turandot that she, too, will know the joys of love. Then she snatches a dagger and kills herself. The crowd forms a funeral procession and the body is taken away. Turandot remains alone to confront Calàf, who impetuously kisses her. Knowing emotion for the first time, Turandot weeps. Calàf, now sure of winning her, reveals his identity.

Once again before the emperor’s throne, Turandot declares she knows the stranger’s name: it is Love.
Premiere: Milan, La Scala, 1926

Puccini’s final opera is a huge and melodious fairy tale set in a China of legend. It has its roots in various folk tales about a princess who tests the worthiness of her suitors by posing a series of riddles and who has those who answer incorrectly killed. Puccini’s art soars in this most unusual score, which features an astounding use of chorus and orchestra that stands with any achievement in opera. Yet for all this, Turandot is recognizably Puccini, bursting with the instantly appealing melodies that are at the core of his universal popularity.

The characters of Ping, Pang, and Pong are descended from the Italian tradition of commedia dell’arte that influenced much of the opera and drama of the 20th century. Puccini had planned to end this opera with a massive and transforming duet, but died before completing it.

The Creators

Giacomo Puccini’s (1858–1924) works are as popular today as they were in his own lifetime. The unenviable task of completing Turandot’s final scene upon Puccini’s death was left to the composer Franco Alfano (1875–1954), whose rarely-performed opera Cyrano de Bergerac (1936) had its Met premiere in 2005. Conductor Arturo Toscanini (1867–1957) oversaw Alfano’s contribution and conducted the world premiere. The opening night performance omitted the Alfano finale when the conductor opted to end the opera where Puccini was in the composition when he died. Subsequent performances at La Scala used Alfano’s ending, but, at Toscanini’s urging, a heavily cut version. The librettists for Turandot were the playwright and journalist Giuseppe Adami (1878–1946), who had previously written the librettos for Puccini’s Il Tabarro and La Rondine, and Renato Simoni (1875–1952), who had written librettos for other composers. The source of the story, supposedly suggested by Puccini himself, was the play Turandotte by the Venetian playwright Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806). Gozzi wrote satirical fantasies and later tragedies for the Venetian stage at a time of intense debate about the relative merits of realism and fantasy in dramatic art.

The Setting

Gozzi’s play used the commedia dell’arte characters in their original form. In his play they wandered from Italy to China and were members of the Imperial
court. Their comments satirized Venetian politics and mores of the times. Puccini and his librettists dispensed with any such relevance. The China of this opera, set in “legendary times,” is a mythical neverland where the clash of the sexes is drawn in high relief.

_The Music_

The large orchestra calls for a wide variety of instruments, including alto saxophones, celesta, bass xylophone, harps (originally designated to be muffled with pieces of paper between the strings), and an organ. Puccini uses the chorus to great effect in _Turandot_, from the bloodthirsty rabble urging on the executioner in Act I to the sublime “Hymn to the Moon” immediately following. There are several genuine Chinese themes used in _Turandot_ that are integrated into the score in a suave and brilliantly original manner. The big anthem in Act II is based on a Chinese melody, but the orchestra plays harmonies derived from ancient European religious music and the remarkable resulting sound is not specific to any single culture. _Turandot_’s show-stopping Act II aria, “In questa reggia,” and her succeeding confrontation with Calàf create an effect of Wagnerian proportions while still remaining in a firmly Italian style. The opera also contains moments of sheer melodic beauty that only Puccini could create, most notably in Liù’s plaintive aria from Act I, “Signore, ascolta,” and the tenor’s unforgettable song of triumph, “Nessun dorma!”, which opens Act III.

_Turandot at the Met_

The Met gave the United States premiere of _Turandot_ in 1926, shortly after the world premiere in Milan. Tullio Serafin conducted a cast featuring one of Puccini’s favorite sopranos in the title role, Maria Jeritza, paired with Giacomo Lauri-Volpi as Calàf. This impressive duo led most of the subsequent revivals through the 1929–30 season, after which the opera (which had been considered an unusual departure for Puccini) disappeared for several decades. One of the highlights of the Met’s long performance history is the legendary 1961 production of _Turandot_ designed by Cecil Beaton featuring conductor Leopold Stokowski in his company debut and starring Birgit Nilsson, Franco Corelli, and Anna Moffo. The current production by Franco Zeffirelli had its premiere in 1987 with James Levine conducting and Eva Marton, Plácido Domingo, and Leona Mitchell. Other artists who have since taken on the leading roles include Gwyneth Jones and Jane Eaglen (Turandot); Aprile Millo, Teresa Stratas, Ruth Ann Swenson, and Angela Gheorghiu (Liù); and Luciano Pavarotti, Johan Botha, Salvatore Licitra, and Marcello Giordani (Calàf).
The Metropolitan Opera is grateful to Bank of America for its generous support of the 2012–13 season.
One summer day in 1920, Giacomo Puccini had lunch in Milan with a 45-year-old playwright and critic, Renato Simoni. Puccini was between operas, and his search for a libretto—a virtually constant element in his creative life—was becoming desperate. Somehow the conversation turned to the 18th-century Venetian writer Carlo Gozzi and his fanciful play *Turandotte*, a fairy tale set in an invented Orient. Perhaps, as he discussed details of the story with the younger man, Puccini was reminded of an earlier opera, *Turanda*, written by his onetime professor at the Milan Conservatory, Antonio Bazzini, and presented at La Scala in 1867. Or he and Simoni may have talked about a more recent Max Reinhardt production of the Schiller adaptation of Gozzi; it had enjoyed a huge success in Berlin. In fact, when Simoni later sent the text to the composer, it was the Schiller version translated into Italian by Andrea Maffei in the mid-19th century. The composer read it and was convinced.

As always with Puccini, the choice of a libretto did not mean calm sailing toward his objective. He was at times assailed by doubts; he frequently badgered his collaborators (Simoni had been joined by the experienced Giuseppe Adami, librettist of *La Rondine* and *Suor Angelica*) for more words, but then, as he received the text, he demanded changes, cuts, and extensions. This tormented process went on for two years. Finally, on June 25, 1922, the composer could write to his publisher: “Propitious days for me…. Simoni and Adami have delivered to me the libretto of *Turandot*, finished to my complete satisfaction.” This did not mean there were no further changes, but the work of composition could go forward. By February 24, 1924, Puccini had completely orchestrated the first two acts; for the third, he was dissatisfied with the words of the final love duet, the culminating scene of the whole opera. The long-suffering librettists were set to work again. On March 13, Puccini wrote to his friend Sybil Seligman in London: “Adami is here to finish the libretto—the last duet, which has come out very well indeed.”

But the same letter says, ominously: “I have not been at all well and I’ve still got a sore throat and an obstinate cough.” Over the next months in Puccini’s letters, complaints about a sore throat alternate with complaints about the difficulty of completing *Turandot’s* last act. The pain and discomfort finally became so great that Puccini consulted a specialist, who advised an operation at once. Puccini’s son was told the truth: the composer had an advanced cancer of the throat. Puccini himself and his wife were kept in ignorance of the real nature of his illness.

At the beginning of November, Puccini was about to set off for Brussels, where the operation was to be performed. Arturo Toscanini, who was scheduled to conduct the premiere of *Turandot* at La Scala, was in Bologna preparing a production of Boito’s *Nerone*. With him was the director Giovachchino Forzano, a friend and librettist of Puccini’s and his neighbor in Viareggio. Forzano’s wife
telephoned to tell him of the imminent journey of the composer. Forzano and Toscanini went at once to visit Puccini, as the director recalls in his memoirs:

The next morning, with my car, Toscanini and I reached Viareggio. Puccini was expecting us. Toscanini’s visits cheered him. He thanked him, and was happy that Toscanini had taken his Chinese creature to heart. He showed him the whole score of *Turandot*; only a little was lacking to complete it. Once he was back from Brussels he would finish the opera quickly, and he played many passages for us. Unaware of the seriousness of his illness, he joked about the change in his voice. “You hear my tenor’s voice, Arturo?” and, still joking, he vocalized…. We went back to Bologna. We didn’t exchange a word during the whole journey. This was on November 3, 1924.

The next day, when Puccini got into the Brussels train, he was carrying in his suitcase 36 sheets of music paper, all scrawled over with notes: his sketches for the final duet. There are false starts, jotted themes, melodies to be developed, and cryptic messages to himself: “find melody,” “less silly than the other,” and—most puzzling—“then Tristan.”

The treatment was, it seemed, a success. But suddenly, on November 28, Puccini had a heart attack and died the following day. There was a funeral service in Brussels, and another in the Milan cathedral, where Toscanini conducted. Then there was the impelling question: what to do with *Turandot*? After considering other solutions, Toscanini turned to Franco Alfano, a successful composer of operas in his own right. The Italian critic Teodoro Celli wrote, some years ago, of Puccini’s sketches: “An examination of the material…can inspire in us only admiration for what Alfano managed to achieve, not only with an expert’s great mastery, but also with extreme respect and loyalty towards Puccini’s intentions.”

On the night of *Turandot’s* posthumous premiere, April 25, 1926 (with Rosa Raisa in the title role, Miguel Fleta as Calàf, and Maria Zamboni as Liù), the audience at La Scala was unable to admire Alfano’s work. Close to the end of Act III, after the chorus lamented the death of Liù, Toscanini set down his baton and turned to the house, saying, more or less (he has been variously quoted): “Here the opera ends, because at this point the maestro died.” At subsequent performances the Alfano ending was performed, but—at Toscanini’s insistence—heavily cut. In recent years the full Alfano edition has been revived, but its length—however accomplished musically—seems to chill the drama and the finale, and Toscanini’s abbreviated version remains more popular and practical.

—William Weaver
ON STAGE NOW

A Met premiere and three returning favorites!

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Maria Stuarda

DEC 31  JAN 4, 8, 12, 15, 19 mat, 23, 26
Joyce DiDonato takes on the virtuosic bel canto role of the doomed Mary, Queen of Scots, and Elza van den Heever debuts as Elizabeth I in director David McVicar’s Met premiere production.

ROSSINI

The Barber of Seville

JAN 3, 5
Razor-sharp, sung in English, and just two hours long, The Barber of Seville is a rollicking comedy classic the entire family can enjoy. A charming young cast sings Rossini’s tuneful masterpiece.

BERLIOZ

Les Troyens

JAN 1, 5 mat
Deborah Voigt, Susan Graham, Marcello Giordani, and Dwayne Croft star in the first revival in nearly ten years of this Berlioz masterpiece, which unfolds during the final days of the Trojan War.

PUCCINI

Turandot

JAN 2, 7, 10
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Jonas Kaufmann as Parsifal, photographed by Micaela Rossato
The Cast

Dan Ettinger
CONDUCTOR (TEL AVIV, ISRAEL)

THIS SEASON Das Rheingold, Die Walküre, Siegfried, Götterdämmerung, Tosca, and a concert performance of Otello in Mannheim, Turandot at the Met, La Traviata with Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, Tosca with the Vienna State Opera, and concerts with the Tokyo Philharmonic and Israel Symphony Orchestra.

MET APPEARANCES Le Nozze di Figaro (debut, 2009).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS He has been general music director of Mannheim’s National Theater since 2009, became chief conductor of the Tokyo Philharmonic in 2010, and has served as music director and principal conductor of the Israel Symphony Orchestra since 2005. Recent performances include Rigoletto for his debut at Covent Garden, Le Nozze di Figaro for his debut at the Paris Opera, Carmen with the Bavarian State Opera, and L’Italiana in Algeri at the Vienna State Opera.

Hibla Gerzmava
SOPRANO (PITSUNDA, RUSSIA)

THIS SEASON Liù in Turandot at the Met, Vitellia in La Clemenza di Tito at the Vienna State Opera, Mimi in La Bohème at Covent Garden, Violetta in La Traviata on tour in Athens with Moscow’s Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre, and recitals in Moscow and Perm.

MET APPEARANCES Mimi in La Bohème and Antonia in Les Contes d’Hoffmann (debut, 2010).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include Mimi at Covent Garden, for her debut with Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, and in Rome, and Violetta for her debut at Valencia’s Palau de les Arts. She has also appeared as Eva in Haydn’s Die Schöpfung and the Angel in Cavalieri’s Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo at Germany’s Ludwigsburg Festival, and as Lyudmila in Glinka’s Ruslan and Lyudmila, the Swan Princess in Rimsky-Korsakov’s The Tale of Tsar Saltan, Louisa in Prokofiev’s Betrothal in a Monastery, Rosina in Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Mimi and Musetta in La Bohème, the title role of Lucia di Lammermoor, and Adele in Die Fledermaus at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre.
Iréne Theorin
SOPRANO (SÖDRA HESTRA, SWEDEN)

THIS SEASON The title role of Turandot at the Met and with Munich’s Bavarian State Opera and Brünnhilde in Wagner’s Ring cycle at La Scala.

MET APPEARANCES Brünnhilde in Die Walküre (debut, 2009) and Siegfried.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS She has sung Turandot in Copenhagen, Tokyo, Dresden, London, Tel Aviv, and San Francisco and Brünnhilde in complete Ring cycles in Copenhagen, Cologne, and Dresden, as well as in Berlin (Die Walküre), London (Siegfried), and Washington and Tokyo (Siegfried and Götterdämmerung). She has also sung Isolde in Tristan und Isolde in Brussels, Rotterdam, and at the Bayreuth Festival (since 2008), the title role of Ariadne auf Naxos in Washington, and the title role of Elektra at the Salzburg Festival.

Walter Fraccaro
TENOR (CASTELFRANCO, ITALY)

THIS SEASON Calàf in Turandot at the Met, Radamès in Aida with the San Diego Opera, Pinkerton in Madama Butterfly with the Nice Opera, and the title role of Otello at Venice’s La Fenice.

MET APPEARANCES Cavaradossi in Tosca and Pinkerton in Madama Butterfly (debut, 1997).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include des Grieux in Manon Lescaut in Florence, Venice, and Rome, Gabriele Adorno in Simon Boccanegra in Palermo, Manrico in Il Trovatore and Otello in Tokyo and at La Fenice, Turiddu in Cavalleria Rusticana at La Fenice, Calâf with the San Francisco Opera, and Radamès in Rome, Florence, and Verona. He has also appeared at La Scala, the Vienna State Opera, Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, and Arena di Verona, among others.
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The Cast CONTINUED

Samuel Ramey
BASS (COLBY, KANSAS)

THIS SEASON  Timur in Turandot at the Met, Don Basilio in Il Barbiere di Siviglia with New Orleans Opera, and Bluebeard in Bluebeard’s Castle with Opera Omaha.

MET APPEARANCES  More than 300 performances of 28 roles including the company premieres of Rinaldo (Argante, debut, 1984), I Lombardi (Pagano), and Floyd’s Susannah (Olin Blitch). He has also sung Leporello and the title role of Don Giovanni, Méphistophélès in Faust, Escamillo in Carmen, the Four Villains in Les Contes d’Hoffmann, Nick Shadow in The Rake’s Progress, Field Marshall Kutuzov in War and Peace, and Rambaldo in La Rondine.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS  Recent engagements include Claudius in Thomas’s Hamlet at Washington National Opera, Scarpia in Tosca at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Méphistophélès in Nice, and the Grand Inquisitor in Don Carlo with Houston Grand Opera. His repertoire includes more than 50 roles that he has performed in leading opera houses worldwide, including Milan’s La Scala, Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Houston Grand Opera, among many others.

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