

Giacomo Puccini

Turandot

CONDUCTOR
Andris Nelsons

PRODUCTION
Franco Zeffirelli

SET DESIGNER
Franco Zeffirelli

COSTUME DESIGNERS
Anna Anni
AND
Dada Saligeri

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Gil Wechsler

CHOREOGRAPHER
Chiang Ching

STAGE DIRECTOR
David Kneuss

GENERAL MANAGER
Peter Gelb

MUSIC DIRECTOR
James Levine

Opera in three acts

Saturday, November 7, 2009, 1:00–4:05 pm

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The Metropolitan Opera

2009–10 Season

The 274th Metropolitan Opera performance of

Giacomo Puccini's

Turandot

Conductor

Andris Nelsons

Turandot

Maria Guleghina

Liù

Marina Poplavskaya

Calàf

Marcello Giordani

Timur

Samuel Ramey

Emperor Altoum

Charles Anthony

Ping

Joshua Hopkins

Pang

Tony Stevenson*

Pong

Eduardo Valdes

Three Masks

Mark DeChiazza

Andrew Robinson

Sam Meredith

Mandarin

Keith Miller

Executioner

Antonio Demarco

Prince of Persia

Sasha Semin

Handmaidens

Anne Nonnemacher

Mary Hughes

Tempresses

Linda Gelinas

Alexandra Gonzalez

Annemarie Lucania

Rachel Schuette

Saturday, November 7, 2009, 1:00–4:05 pm

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Musical Preparation **Gildo Di Nunzio, Joan Dornemann, Steven Eldredge, Gareth Morrell, Howard Watkins, Joshua Greene, and Hemdi Kfir**
Assistant Stage Directors **J. Knighten Smit and Kathleen Smith Belcher**
Stage Band Conductor **Gregory Buchalter**
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Synopsis

Act I

Outside the Imperial Palace in Peking

Intermission

Act II

SCENE 1 The apartments of Ping, Pang, and Pong in the Imperial Palace

SCENE 2 Before the emperor's throne, within the walls of the Imperial Palace

Intermission

Act III

SCENE 1 The Imperial Gardens

SCENE 2 Before the emperor's throne

Act I

At 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 ("Signore, ascolta!"). Calàf tries to comfort her ("Non piangere, Liù") 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 (Trio: "Ho una casa nell'Honan"), but the noise of the people gathering to hear Turandot question the new challenger calls them back to reality.

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 ("In questa reggia"). 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 ("Nessun dorma!"), 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 ("Tu, che di gel sei cinta"). 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 (Duet: "Principessa di morte!"). Knowing emotion for the first time, Turandot weeps ("Del primo pianto"). 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.

Giacomo Puccini

Turandot

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. Puccini's 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 composed 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 leading roles sung by Eva Marton, Plácido Domingo, and Leona Mitchell.

Program Note

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 Giovacchino 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 Calà, 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

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The Cast



Andris Nelsons
CONDUCTOR (RIGA, LATVIA)

THIS SEASON *Turandot* for his debut at the Met, *La Bohème* at Covent Garden, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* with the Vienna State Opera, his debut at the Bayreuth Festival leading a new production of *Lohengrin*, his debut at the Salzburg Festival, and appearances conducting the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra at the BBC Proms, Lucerne Festival, and Berlin Festival.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Currently music director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, he was music director of the Latvian National Opera from 2003–07 and principal conductor of the Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie in Herford, Germany. Recent engagements include *The Queen of Spades* for his debut last season with the Vienna State Opera, *Eugene Onegin* with the Deutsche Oper Berlin, and *Turandot* with the Berlin State Opera (Unter den Linden).



Maria Guleghina
SOPRANO (ODESSA, UKRAINE)

THIS SEASON The title role of *Turandot* at the Met and in Seville and Berlin, Abigail in *Nabucco* at the Vienna State Opera and in Zurich, and *Tosca* with the Deutsche Oper Berlin.

MET APPEARANCES Lisa in *The Queen of Spades*, Adriana in *Adriana Lecouvreur*, Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Norma, Maddalena in *Andrea Chénier* (debut, 1991), *Tosca*, Aida, Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Abigail, Dolly in *Sly*, and Giorgetta in *Il Tabarro*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Odabella in *Attila*, *Tosca*, Lady Macbeth, and Abigail at the Paris Opera; *Violetta* in *La Traviata* in Japan; Norma at the Santander and La Coruña Festivals; Abigail, *Tosca*, and Maddalena with the Vienna State Opera; Elena in a concert version of *I Vespri Siciliani* with the Washington National Opera; and Abigail at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre.



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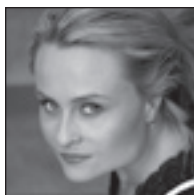
Berlioz

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The Metropolitan Opera



Marina Poplavskaya
SOPRANO (MOSCOW, RUSSIA)

THIS SEASON Liù in *Turandot* at the Met, Elizabeth in *Don Carlo* and Amelia in *Simon Boccanegra* at Covent Garden, Leonora in *Il Trovatore* in Zurich, Marguerite in *Faust* at the Berlin State Opera (Under den Linden), and Rachel in *La Juive* in Tel Aviv.

MET APPEARANCES Natasha in *War and Peace* (debut, 2007).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include her debut as Violetta in *La Traviata* at the Netherlands Opera, followed by performances in Los Angeles and in Seoul; Marguerite in *Faust* in Berlin; Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin* and Rachel at Covent Garden; and Desdemona in *Otello* at the Salzburg Festival and for the Rome Opera, both under Riccardo Muti. She made her Paris debut at the St. Denis Festival in 2009 in Rachmaninov's *The Bells* and at Brussels's La Monnaie in the Verdi Requiem. She has also sung Maria in *Mazeppa* and Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress* at the Bolshoi Opera and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* at Covent Garden, in Valencia, and in Avignon.



Marcello Giordani
TENOR (AUGUSTA, ITALY)

THIS SEASON Calaf in *Turandot*, Gabriele Adorno in *Simon Boccanegra*, and Cavaradossi in *Tosca* at the Met; Gustavo in *Un Ballo in Maschera* and Cavaradossi at the Vienna State Opera; the title role of *Faust* at La Scala; and Arnold in a concert performance of *Guillaume Tell* at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw.

MET APPEARANCES Faust in *La Damnation de Faust*, Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Roméo in *Roméo et Juliette*, des Grieux in *Manon Lescaut* and *Manon*, Ernani, Benvenuto Cellini, Rodolfo in *La Bohème* (debut, 1995), Alfredo in *La Traviata*, Lenski in *Eugene Onegin*, Gualtiero in *Il Pirata*, Gustavo, and Enzo in *La Gioconda*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS The Sicilian tenor has sung in all the world's leading theaters. Among his recent performances are Andrea Chénier in Zurich, Calaf at La Scala, Cavaradossi and Roméo at the Arena di Verona, Paolo in Zandoni's *Francesca da Rimini* in Zurich, Arnold at the Vienna State Opera, and Henri in *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* with Paris's Bastille Opera.

Humperdinck

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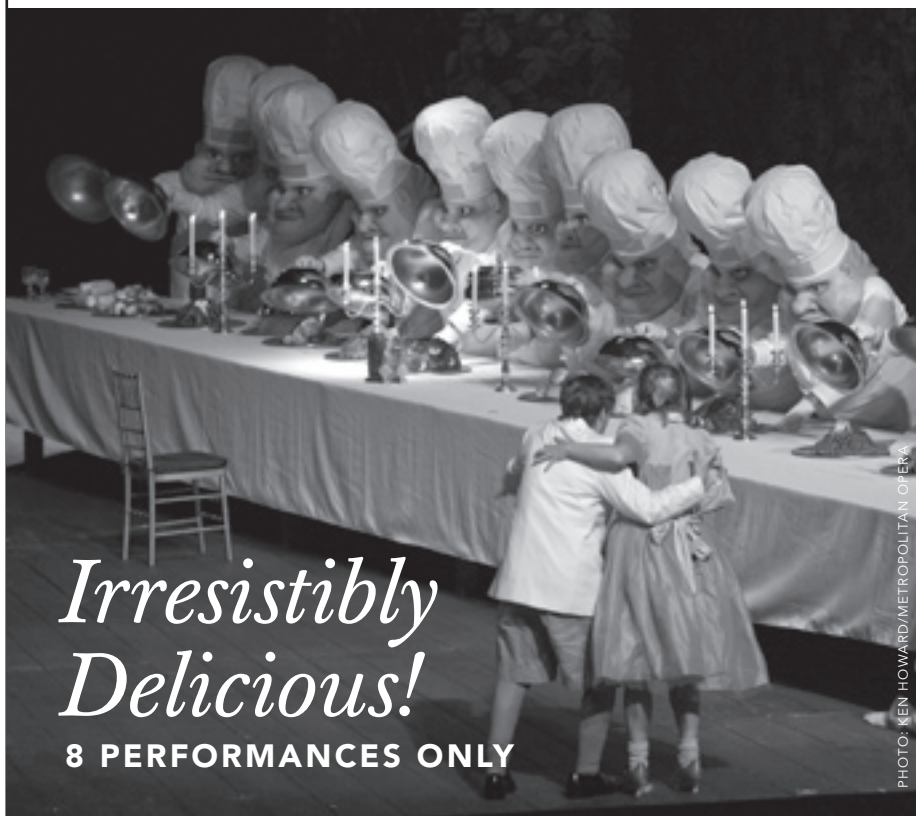


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Samuel Ramey
BASS (COLBY, KANSAS)

THIS SEASON Timur in *Turandot*, Leone in *Attila*, and Don Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at the Met; Claudius in *Hamlet* with the Washington National Opera; and recitals with Frederica von Stade in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.

MET APPEARANCES Nearly 300 performances of 25 roles including the company premieres of *Rinaldo* (Argante, debut, 1984), *I Lombardi* (Pagano), and Floyd's *Susannah* (Olin Blicht). 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 He has sung his repertoire of more than 50 roles at opera houses worldwide, including Milan's La Scala, Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Houston Grand Opera, among many others.

On Stage at the Met

A striking new cast takes on the lead roles in Robert Lepage's dazzling staging of *La Damnation de Faust*: Ramón Vargas, Olga Borodina, and Ildar Abdrazakov. Janáček's *From the House of the Dead*, directed by the legendary Patrice Chéreau, is the first of four Met premieres this season. Peter Mattei leads the ensemble cast. Jack O'Brien's monumental production of Puccini's *Il Trittico* stars Patricia Racette and Stephanie Blythe in all three of the one-act operas. Mozart's timeless masterpiece *Le Nozze di Figaro* also returns to the lineup.

Berlioz

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