



MONTREAL

CITY OF MUSIC 2004

Saturday, November 27, 2004 1:00 p.m. (EST), 7:05 p.m. (UTC)
SALLE WILFRID-PELLETIER, PLACE DES ARTS

***TURANDOT* (1926)** **Opera by Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)**

Lyrical drama in three acts

Libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, based on the fable by Carlo Gozzi

Conductor: **Yannick Nézet-Séguin**
Stage Director and Choreographer: **Renaud Doucet**
Sets and Costumes: **Allen Charles Klein**¹
Lighting Designer: **Guy Simard**
Asst. Conductor and Chorus Master: **Jean-Marie Zeitouni**
Fencing Master: **Huy Phong Doan**
Rehearsal pianist: **Claude Webster**

Orchestre Métropolitain du Grand Montréal
Chœur de l'Opéra de Montréal

A Mandarin: **Etienne Dupuis** (baritone) ²
Liù: **Marie-Josée Lord** (soprano)
Calaf: **Renzo Zulian** (tenor)
Timur: **Denis Sedov** (bass)
Ping: **Aaron St. Clair Nicholson** (baritone)
Pong: **Kurt Lehmann** (tenor)
Pang: **Frédéric Antoun** (tenor)
Emperor Altoum: **Pierre Lefèbvre** (tenor)
Turandot: **Anna Shafajinskaia** (soprano)

¹for the Florida Grand Opera

²member of l'Atelier Lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal

Synopsis

Act I

Peking, in legendary times. In front of the Imperial palace. A law governs the empire: the prince who solves Princess Turandot's three riddles will obtain her hand, if he fails, he will die. This is the fate that is about to befall the prince of Persia. In the tumult, an old man falls and is helped by a young man, Calaf, who immediately recognizes his father, Timur, the dethroned king of Tartary. Fearing that Calaf will be killed, Timur keeps his name and title from him and reveals that Liù is the only person who has remained loyal to him. Turandot orders the execution to be carried out. Calaf is dazzled by Turandot's beauty and decides to take on the challenge.

Act II – Scene 1

In a chamber of the palace. Three ministers, Ping, Pang and Pong, hope that love will finally conquer Turandot's unfeeling heart and that peace will return. When the crowd gathers to watch the new challenger try the series of riddles, the three ministers are called back to harsh reality.

Act II – Scene 2

Across from the palace. Turandot recounts the story of her ancestor, Princess Lo-uling, who was slain by a stranger. Turandot has devised this test to avenge her death. She presents her first riddle and the prince immediately replies, "Hope." The second one is more difficult. Calaf hesitates for a moment and then answers, "Blood." She asks the third riddle and Calaf answers triumphantly, "Turandot." Turandot begs her father to free her of her promise. Calaf proposes a riddle of his own: if she can learn his name before dawn, he will give up his life as if he had failed the challenge.

Act III – Scene 1

The palace gardens. Turandot decrees that no one will sleep until they have learned the stranger's name. When Turandot orders Timur to speak, Liù intervenes, saying she alone knows the prince's identity. She is tortured but still she does not speak. When Turandot asks her where she finds such great courage, Liù replies, "Love," then stabs herself. Alone with Turandot, Calaf reproaches her for her cruelty. Turandot admits that she had loved and feared him from the first moment she laid eyes on him. Calaf reveals his identity and puts his fate in her hands.

Act III – Scene 2

Across from the palace. At dawn, Turandot and Calaf appear before the Emperor. Turandot declares that she now knows the stranger's name: it is Love.

Historical Notes

Turandot

Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924)

Premiere: Milan, Teatro alla Scala, April 25, 1926

Last production at the Opéra de Montréal: May 1997

It was at a meeting between Puccini and two of his librettists in Milan in the winter of 1919–1920 that the idea of writing an opera based on Gozzi's fable *Turandot* first emerged.

In its original form, Gozzi's *Turandot* is a comic tragedy in five acts, with numerous characters, including some that were left out of the opera. The librettists did, however, take Puccini's suggestion to invent the characters of Liù as well as the ministers Ping, Pang and Pong, who come straight out of the commedia dell'arte. The Chinese melodies heard throughout the work were inspired in part by a music box belonging to a friend of Puccini.

Composition was long and arduous. The first act, which appeared to be completed in June 1921, was, in fact, finished in the fall of 1922. The second act followed shortly afterward. But the third act was only undertaken a year later.

Fate was also to intervene in this protracted process. The pains that Puccini had been experiencing in his throat for some time worsened. An agreement was reached with Arturo Toscanini and La Scala in Milan for the presentation of *Turandot* the following spring. Puccini's suffering became unbearable, and an examination in October 1924 revealed that he had throat cancer. He succumbed to heart failure on November 29 of the same year.

There was no question of abandoning *Turandot*. Franco Alfano, a friend of Puccini, completed the work based on notes left by the composer. Toscanini, it seems, was furious with the result. At the premiere, after Liù's death scene, Toscanini put down his baton and, turning to the audience, announced, "Giacomo Puccini stopped here. In this case, death triumphs over art." Then, the curtain came down slowly, and the long silence was followed by a thundering ovation. The next evening, the work was presented again, this time with Alfano's conclusion.

As of 1926, *Turandot* had been performed on nine stages around the world. The work is considered the pinnacle of Puccini's achievements, for its wealth of musical ideas and its "modern" style. *Turandot* is now one of the classics of 20th-century opera.