



Insights. Highlights.
All that makes for a great night.
Your guide to making the most of Puccini's final opera.

(An awesome cover page, if we do say so.)

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Know How

The Belk Theater.

Get There

Visting Center City doesn't have to be a tough trip.

Blumenthal Performing Arts Center

130 N. Tryon St
Charlotte, NC 28202

Ride. Hop on the Lynx Lightrail. Check out the options [here](#).

Drive. Directions from door to door [here](#).

Park. Participating garages are just \$5. Find details [here](#).

Make any seat in the house the best one.

Attending an opera in the Belk Theater is an experience not to be forgotten. The performance you are attending is the **final dress rehearsal** in which the cast performs one last full run through of the opera before opening night. Just like a regular performance, there will be an intermission(s) between acts.

Upon entering the theater, notice the production crew's station in the orchestra level seating (the lowest level of seating). The crew is set up with computers and headsets to allow them to communicate with people backstage to ensure that the performance runs smoothly. During this final rehearsal they will be making sure all cues and technical features of the performance are in place. Also notice the supertitles

(English translations of the lyrics being sung) that are projected onto a screen above the stage.

Please remember that this is a **working performance** and the performers on stage are very aware of their audience, especially a distracting audience. The polite audience member should always refrain from talking and stay seated during a performance. Nothing shows more respect and appreciation for the performers on stage than giving them your full attention.

Shout it Out

Give a shout out to the cast after a beautiful aria or at the end of the evening – literally! Shout **"Bravi!"** for a job well done to the whole cast, **"Brava!"** to the diva who aced it, or **"Bravo!"** to the guy who left it all on the stage.

Opera Carolina

Real history. Real people. Real community.



Then, now, & years from now

Let's take a journey back to 1948: the Charlotte Music Club is formed by a handful of arts enthusiasts who realize that Charlotte's artistic landscape –but more importantly, cultural community– would be enhanced by opera performances. Fast forward to today: Opera Carolina is a 66 year-old company that's still blossoming, hitting new highs with each season of glorious music, drama, and all that encompasses the operatic art form. Your resident Opera continues to bring high-quality standards of the operatic repertoire to stages near you, but is also continually striving to perform lesser-known gems.

What does our future hold? A rich commitment to our community –which we take seriously– to continue enriching the lives of citizens from all walks of life; a continual quest to produce excellent opera from all eras on our stage; and, most importantly, to connect our community.

The people

In the early days of Opera Carolina, volunteers designed the sets, built costumes, sang in the chorus, filled leading roles and, of course, sold tickets and held fundraisers to support the company.

Now a fully professional company that not only produces Opera performances on a big scale but also travels programs into local schools and community venues, we never forget the legacy of the original volunteers who made this company the what it is today. Opera Carolina is rooted in the

Carolinas; 90% of our company live and work right here in our region, complimenting the international artists who join the resident company to perform on our mainstage. We guess you can say we've got Carolina on our mind.

The House

If the paragraphs before didn't sell you on our commitment to our community, maybe information on the Opera Center will. We may be 66 years old, but we've just moved out on our own. Opera Carolina now resides in the historic Biberstein house, in the Elizabeth neighborhood. The last remaining historic home in the Uptown radius, Opera Carolina's new digs are as much a part of the community as is the company.

Built in 1906, the Biberstein House was designed and lived in by R. C. Biberstein, one of the noted mill architects of the Southeast. Mr. Biberstein is credited with building many of the mills in the Charlotte region, including the Highland Park #3 mill. Mr. Biberstein eventually moved his business into this house, his talents and self-designed home playing a role in the New South Industrial movement. Today, the home is registered as a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmark.

The house has since been adapted into offices and is now the proud home of Opera Carolina. The Opera Center hosts the company's administrative offices but also serves as space for auditions, recitals, and more. *Our doors are always open.*



12
operas written

EDISON
Puccini, who had an avid interest in technology, became good friend and regular correspondent with famous inventor Thomas Edison.



Puccini

The Music Man.

Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini

What a name! He may have a long name but Giacomo Puccini is one of the first names that comes to mind when you talk about opera. Our composer was born in Lucca, in the Tuscan region of Italy, to a family five generations deep in music, after all of whom he is named. Like many famous composers, Puccini began studying music at an early age; when he was five years old his father died and Puccini was made to continue his studies with his uncle Fortunato, who thought he was a poor student. It wasn't until he saw Verdi's opera *Aida* (1876) at age 20 that he decided to dedicate his life to composing opera.

Puccini set off to school in Milan at the Conservatory (*the* Milan Conservatory, a big deal) and there wrote his first opera, *Le Villi*, which earned him enough notice to get a second opera

commissioned. This second work, *Edgar*, had a lousy story and mediocre libretto, which taught Puccini a valuable lesson about choosing librettists wisely. He went on to write new, successful operas, including his most successful works: *La Boheme*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*. He was considered the head of the table among the *giovane scuola* (the young school of Italian composers) after completing such international hits. He was even commissioned to write an opera for the Metropolitan Opera, *La Fanciulla del West*.

Puccini was working on his twelfth opera, *Turandot*, at the time of his death from complications of throat cancer. Franco Alfano finished the opera shortly following Puccini's death, and a new ending was composed in recent history (2002) by Italian composer Luciano Berio.

Real Roots

The Story.

A centuries-old story makes for a 20th-century success.

As is the case in most operas, *Turandot* wasn't an original idea. Puccini based his opera on a play, *Turandotte*, but we'll get to that in a second – let's start with *the* original version, which came from ancient Persia.

The fable “Turandokht”, meaning daughter of Turan, became known after it was published in a collection of Persian stories, called *The Book of One Thousand and One Days* (it's sister collection, *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights* – aka *Arabian Nights*– is more widely known). Turandokht is one of the best-known characters from this collection and Gozzi incorporated this story into his series of theatrical “fables”, calling it *Turandotte*. But Puccini didn't stumble across this inspiration for the opera himself; it was one of his librettists, Renato Simoni (a bit biased as a Gozzi scholar), who suggested the work as the subject for the opera. Puccini had seen theatrical adaptations of the work and was on board with *Turandotte*, which he and his librettists, Simoni and Giuseppe Adami, would recraft – the other incarnations were quite complicated!

Cast.

Turandot, China's beautiful yet ice-hearted princess

The Unknown Prince (Caláf), son of Timur who's head over heels for Turandot

Liù, the slave girl who is Timur's faithful companion who's in love with the Prince

Timur, the old & feeble dethroned King of Tartary

Ping, Pang, & Pong, ministers in China's bureaucracy & rather comical

Mandarin, a bureaucratic scholar

Emperor Altoum, Turandot's father and ruler of China

Maestro, conductor, interpreter, and all around great guy

Synopsis.

The Forbidden City, Beijing, in legendary times.

Like dozens before him, the Prince of Persia has failed to answer Turandot's three riddles and is to be executed at the rise of the moon. Bloodthirsty citizens urge the executioner on, and in the tumult, an old man is bumped to the ground by an Unknown Prince - his long-lost son. The old man, Timur, former King of Tartary, introduces the slave girl, Liù, to the Prince. When the old man tells his son, (the unknown) Prince, that only Liù has remained faithful to him, the prince asks her why. She replies, “It is because once, long ago, you smiled on me.” The moon has risen and Princess Turandot appears, giving the order to behead the Prince of Persia. At a single glimpse of her, the Unknown Prince is smitten with her and declares himself as her next suitor. Rushing to sound the gong that announces the arrival of each new suitor, Turandot's ministers, Ping, Pang and Pong, try to stop the Prince to no avail. Timur and Liù plead the Prince to rethink his decision. Despite their pleas, he strikes the gong and declares himself ready for the test.

Meanwhile, back in their quarters Ping, Pang and Pong reminisce on their lives before becoming ministers of death under Turandot's bloody reign. They pray that love will conquer her icy heart so peace can return. As the people gather to hear Turandot question the new challenger, the ministers are called back to harsh reality. Emperor Altoum offers the Prince one final chance to back out of his quest, but the Prince soldiers on. Before the trial, Turandot tells the story of her ancestor Princess Lou-Ling - brutally slain by a conquering Prince – and how she avenges her death by the three riddles, preventing any man from possessing her. She asks her first question: “What is born each night and dies each dawn?” The Prince answers correctly. Unnerved, Turandot continues: “What flickers red and warm like a flame, yet is not fire?” Another correct answer. Shaken, Turandot delivers her final riddle: “What is like ice but burns like fire?” After an intense silence, a third correct answer! The crowd salutes the Prince while the Princess begs her father not to abandon her to a stranger, but he refuses to release her from her sacred oath. The Prince, still madly in love, offers Turandot a riddle of his own: “Tell me my name by dawn, and at dawn I shall die.”

The proclamation is made: “On pain of death, no one shall sleep until the stranger's name is learned.” In the famous aria, *Nessun Dorma* (No one may sleep), the Prince muses on the joy the morning will bring. The mob threatens the Prince in order to learn his name while soldiers drag in Liù and Timur to learn his name. When Turandot appears, commanding the dazed Timur to speak, Liù cries out that she alone knows the stranger's identity. Through all the tortures of the guards she remains silent. Shaken by the resolve of this slave girl, Turandot asks why Liù would sacrifice herself in this way – “For love,” she replies. This simple reply shakes the icy Princess. As the soldiers to intensify the torture, Liù snatches a dagger from one of them and kills herself. The grieving Timur and the crowd follow her body as it is carried away.*

Turandot remains alone to confront the Prince, who at length takes her in his arms, forcing her to kiss him. Knowing physical passion for the first time, Turandot weeps. The Prince, now sure of his victory, tells her his name: Caláf. As the people hail the emperor, Turandot approaches his throne, announcing that the stranger's name is *Love*.

*Here Puccini stopped composing, passing away a few short months afterwards.

Turandot

The Music

On the tails of a real revolution.



What to listen for.

Turandot was written on the tails of an operatic revolution, led by Verdi and Wagner, in which the music and drama advanced together and were extremely dependent upon one another. This final Puccini work was also written in the drastically changing musical landscape of the 20th century, in which musical boundaries were being expanded.

All those things we love about Puccini – great arias, sensational drama, grandeur, and an exotic feel – can be witnessed in *Turandot*, as well as the presence of the 20th century's influence on music, mainly in form of new types of harmonies.

New & Exotic Harmonics

Pentatonicism – While Western music is based on an 8-note diatonic scale, Eastern music is often based on the 5-note pentatonic scale. Play any 5 black keys on the piano and you'll hear it! **Tri-tones** – A dissonant interval (*do-fi*) avoided at all costs in early music. They even coined it *diabolus in musica* – the devil in music! Puccini uses it freely to express the icy Princess Turandot, her ghosts, and her servants. **Bitonality** – The use of two (*bi-*) different tonal keys next to each other, which usually has a very jarring sound. The very opening of the curtain is bitonal (c-sharp minor over d minor); something is certainly wrong in China as we begin our journey!

A beefed up percussion section

Xylophones, bells, Gongs & Tam tams, glockenspiel and more were added to the standard Western percussion section.

Traditional Chinese tunes

Puccini quoted some 8 different traditional Chinese folk tunes throughout the opera. The most notable is “Mo Li Hua”, or “Jasmine Flower”, and it follows Princess Turandot throughout the opera.

Real gems.

Aria Ready for This?

Check out these big hits from the opera – you won't want to miss them.

In questa reggia

Turandot's big number where we learn of her plight and she reminds us that, for the princes who “come here to try [their] fortune,” “the riddles are three, death is one!” [Take a listen.](#)

Tu che di gel

Liù's final aria that is the response to Turandot's question of how she can resist the torture so well. A great hint, just before she takes her life. [Take a listen.](#)

Nessun dorma

Perhaps the most popular aria ever written (and Pavarotti's signature diddy). This is The Unknown Prince's (Calàf's) big number where he declares that he will be victorious in his quest.

[Take a listen.](#)

The Reviews

Real World Connections.

While Western audiences applauded the posthumous premiere of *Turandot* those in the East were not as thrilled. Explore and expand upon these real world connections to discover some real ramifications.



Art as a Medium for Exchange

Art often reveals many clues and inspires discovery about a culture and its perceptions across the globe. What artistic experience(s) can you recall that helped you learn about a culture or help you share your culture with others?

Repeat Offender.

This isn't the first time Puccini has imposed cultural viewpoints (whether purposely or otherwise).

Madama Butterfly and *La Fanciulla del West* have also been controversial when considering cultural messages.

Discover why!

Considering the Cultural Consequences

Even though *Turandot* is considered a fantasy, it was not well-received in China. In fact, it was considered an insult and banned from their stages!

Why do you think the Chinese reacted negatively to this display of their culture?

(Be sure to consider the portrayal of the icy Princess, the three numskull ministers, the fickle crowd, and the overall display of the empire.)

This is an example of **cultural imperialism**, or the imposition of a worldview or attitude of a culture (East) by another culture (West). Imperialism often has a negative connotation.

It wasn't until the 1990s that the Chinese allowed *Turandot* to take place on stages in their country. In 1998, the opera was performed in the Forbidden City and it was also adapted to several Chinese styles of opera (Sichuan, Peking, and Yu). Check it out [here](#). Most recently, the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing staged *Turandot* in 2008, which went on tour throughout the China. This staging of the opera was not in its original form, though. Chinese composer Hao Weiya was engaged to help write a new ending.

How do you think he used the new ending to help Chinese culture be more accurately represented?

What would you change in the opera or add to the end to make it more accurately nationalistic?

Check out this [article](#) to discover the ways in which Weiya improved Puccini's opera!



[mis]Appropriation?

It's not uncommon to experience an aspect of one culture that's been fused into another – we call it **appropriation**. In the arts it runs rampant, taking form as borrowing existing images, elements, or techniques. *Turandot* is a prime example.

As we mentioned in the Music section, Puccini was in a phase of “exoticism” and seeking to push his boundaries. Take a listen to some highlights from *Turandot* and see if you can hear the “Chinese-ness” of the music.

[The finale](#)

[The Children's Chorus](#)

[Liù's Torture](#)

While Puccini used other folk tunes, the most famous example of appropriation in *Turandot* is the use of the melody of the Chinese folk song “[Mo li hua](#)”, or “Jasmine Flower”. The use of this well-known melody is meant to represent *Turandot*'s splendor (Puccini's setting sounds grand, but the original words to the tune are also grand!)

Where else have you experienced appropriation in art? Consider hip hop's technique of sampling, Chinese character tattoos, and the like.

Remember how Chinese citizens were offended over *Turandot*? Chew on this:

Is it ethical to borrow from another culture that is not yours?

Explore

The prime sources for Puccini's ultimate work.

The Chinese dynasty structure versus Italian government of Puccini's time or even our government structure today.

Connect the Curricular Dots

Classroom Connections.

Taking the opera beyond the Belk.



Create

Your own dramatic ending to Puccini's story.

A rewritten version of a scene from a different character's perspective.

A spin-off story or episode.

Analyze

The mathematical patterns used to create the pentatonic, diatonic, and other various scalar modes.

A few probable outcomes and statistics of Princess Turandot's riddles. (What are the odds? *Literally.*)



Now you know it all

See you at the Opera.

Opera Carolina

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