

# TURANDOT

2022-23 Guidebook



EXPERIENCE OPERA  
WITH US!

# A LETTER TO TEACHERS

Opera Colorado is pleased to provide engaging educational programs and performances for students across Colorado. What follows is a guide we hope you and your students find useful in exploring Opera Colorado's production of Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot*.

In the spirit of exploration, we have included various lessons connecting the production with different subjects. The lessons reference the Colorado Department of Education's Academic Standards, focusing specifically on high school expectations. Please feel free to adapt Guidebook materials and use them in the manner most helpful for you and your students. We encourage you to expand, alter, and modify these lessons to best suit you and your students' needs. Following the performance, you will receive a link to a brief survey. Your feedback is much appreciated. We look forward to seeing you at the opera!

*Thank you!*

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# MEET THE ARTISTS

Before rehearsals begin, opera singers study to master the music and the drama for their roles so they are ready to go on the first day of rehearsal. Opera Colorado's cast for *Turandot* includes premier artists from around the country, ready to share their incredible voices!



**JONATHAN BURTON**  
CALÀF



**KARA SHAY THOMSON**  
PRINCESS TURANDOT



**HAROLD WILSON**  
TIMUR



**JANAI BRUGGER**  
LIÙ



**ALEX MONSOORI**  
PANG



**CRAIG VERM**  
PING



**MARTIN BAKARI**  
PONG



# MEET THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Opera Colorado's production of *Turandot* has over 200 people working behind the scenes. This includes eleven dressers, twenty stagehands, and the talented managers, assistants, and designers listed below.



**ARIA UMEZAWA**  
DIRECTOR



**ALISON MILAN**  
COSTUME DIRECTOR



**GINA HAYS**  
STAGE MANAGER



**RONELL OLIVERI**  
WIG AND MAKEUP DESIGNER



**BEN KARASIK**  
PRODUCTION MANAGER



# MEET THE MUSIC TEAM

Opera Colorado's production of *Turandot* has over 200 people working behind the scenes. This includes fifty-six orchestra members, thirty-nine chorus singers, and the talented musicians and managers listed below.



**ARI PELTO**  
CONDUCTOR



**KEUN-A LEE**  
REPETITEUR



**SAHAR NOURI**  
CHORUS MASTER  
AND ASSISTANT  
CONDUCTOR



**CODY GARRISON**  
CHORUS MUSIC REHEARSAL  
ACCOMPANIST



**ANGIE DOMBROWSKI**  
ORCHESTRA MANAGER



# Quick Facts

**Composers:** Giacomo Puccini & Franco Alfano

**Librettists:** Guiseppe Adami & Renato

Simoni

**Premiere:** Milan, April 25, 1926

**Source:** Adapted from the 1762 play by

Carlo Gozzi

**Setting:** A fabricated version of ancient

China

## The Unfinished Opera

Towards the end of his life, Puccini contracted cancer of the larynx and underwent the, then, highly experimental treatment of radiation therapy. Puccini died from the disease in 1924, shortly after his treatment, leaving his last opera, *Turandot*, unfinished. Composer Franco Alfano completed the score. At the premier, conductor Arturo Toscanini stopped the performance after the funeral dirge for Liù to explain that Puccini had died before completing the rest of the opera. He then continued with the performance of Alfano's ending.

10

In total, Puccini composed ten operas during his lifetime.

53

In the 2022-23 Season, fifty-three theatres will produce *Turandot*.

3

This is Opera Colorado's third production of *Turandot*. Our first was in 1984, and we staged it again in 2001.

*I'm Puccini!*





# TURANDOT BASICS

## Main Characters

### Emperor Altoum's Household

**Altoum** - Emperor

**Turandot** - Princess and Altoum's heir

**Pang** - Chief Administrator

**Pong** - Head Chef

**Ping** - Grand Chancellor

### King Timur's Household

**Timur** - exiled king of Tartary

**Liù** - devoted servant of Timur

**Calàf** - king Timur's son, also living  
in exile

## Brief Summary

Operas portray grandiose stories about momentous events. This way, the grandeur of the plot matches the grandeur of the staging and the music. Puccini's *Turandot* takes place in a fictional version of ancient China, fabricated from Puccini's imaginings of a place and culture he never experienced. The opera tells the story of Princess Turandot, who has set three riddles to challenge any man wishing to marry her. Just one wrong answer, and the suitor loses his head! Entranced by Turandot's beauty, the exiled prince Calàf takes the challenge and successfully answers the riddles. After seeing Turandot's distress, he offers her a way out: Calàf declares he will surrender his life if she can guess his name by the next day. Turandot tortures Liù, the one person who knows the answer, but Liù takes her own life rather than betray Calàf, whom she loves. Calàf then reveals his name to Turandot, who chooses love over revenge.





# PLOT SUMMARY

## ACT ONE

*Setting: A fabricated version of ancient China*

“People of Beijing,” declares the emperor’s official, “it is the law that Turandot, the Pure, will wed the man of royal blood who can solve three riddles she asks him. If he fails this test, he will meet his fate with the executioner’s axe.” A crowd of listeners cheers this announcement and awaits the execution of Turandot’s latest suitor—the Prince of Persia, who will be beheaded at the rising of the moon.

Amidst the jostling crowd is the exiled King Timur and his loyal servant Liù. Timur stumbles and falls amidst the chaos, and Liù pleads for someone to help her bring him to his feet. Assistance comes from a stranger in the crowd, Prince Calàf, who instantly recognizes Timur as his father, the exiled king of Tartary. Both father and son have been in hiding, lest the usurper who seized their throne find them. That each survived the capture of their kingdom was unknown to them until this moment. In the course of their reunion, Calàf learns that Liù has stood by Timur because Calàf once smiled at her.

As the Prince of Persia is brought out for his execution, Calàf calls upon Turandot to appear so he may curse her for this brutality. Dismissively, she does so, and, without a word, signals for the man’s death. Overcome by her beauty, Calàf decides to challenge for her hand himself. The emperor’s comic

bureaucratic ministers Ping, Pang, and Pong mock his intention, telling him to give up women or take one hundred wives, but not this one. They cannot dissuade him, nor can mysterious unseen voices that evoke love. Timur and Liù add their voices, he begging not to be left alone, she admitting that she has long carried his name in her heart. Calàf only pleads with Liù to cease weeping and remain loyal to his father. Then, striking the ritual gong, Calàf declares his candidacy.



Costume rendering by Umberto Brunelleschi for the 1926 production in Rome



# PLOT SUMMARY

## ACT TWO

Lamenting the deaths of so many suitors, the three comic ministers hope that this time, Turandot shall feel love, not only sparing this new, unnamed challenger, but bringing peace to the kingdom. Weary of planning funerals for executed princes, they long to plan a wedding. Better yet, each imagines the joy of a quiet life by the lakes, forests, and gardens of the countryside, far from Beijing. Turandot's father, the Emperor, asks Calàf (who has not disclosed his name to anyone) to withdraw, declaring he feels the weight of this unending sequence of deaths. Calàf declares he is determined to go forward with his attempt.

Turandot then explains why she has set the challenge of the riddles. She tells an old tale from this very kingdom, the story of Princess Lo-u-Ling, who, thousands of years earlier, was abducted and slain by a conquering prince. In remembrance of her predecessor, and in revenge for Lo-u-Ling's fate,

Turandot has determined that no prince shall win her heart, and that death shall be the price of even attempting to gain her hand. Trumpet calls signal that the time has come for Calàf to face the challenge. Turandot declaims her three riddles:

- What is born each night and dies at dawn?
- What flickers red and warm like fire but is not fire?
- What is like ice but burns, and in enslaving you, makes you king?

Calàf answers each correctly: hope; blood; Turandot! Hoorah! Not only shall he live, but Turandot shall be his! Turandot pleads with her father not to force her to accept this man, but the emperor holds her to the bargain. Still hoping to win her love, not just her reluctant acquiescence, Calàf makes a counter-offer: learn my name by dawn and you may take my life. Turandot accepts.



Galileo Chini's set design for the debut production in Milan, Act two, scene two





# PLOT SUMMARY

## ACT THREE

An official proclamation orders that no one shall sleep until Turandot learns the stranger's name. Calàf reflects that, proclamation or not, none would sleep in anticipation of what may happen in the morning: will he live or will he die? A compelling question, and not just for himself: for his part, Calàf anticipates only triumph. However, the waiting crowd is tense and wary, knowing that if no one shares the desired name with Turandot, they, the onlookers, will be slain in the Unknown Prince's place. The three ministers try to persuade Calàf to leave the city, offering him all manner of pleasures and treasures. Nevertheless, he remains resolute.

Soldiers drag in Timur and Liù for questioning, declaring the two were seen talking to the stranger. It is suspected they know the man's name, information that shall be dragged from them by any means necessary. Watching the scene, Calàf attempts unsuccessfully to intervene. He does not fear for his own fate, but certainly for that of Timur and Liù. However, even under torture, Liù refuses to betray Calàf, saying to Turandot that love gives her the strength to resist, and that someday, Turandot, too, will feel love. At last, Liù, fearful she will succumb and betray Calàf's identity, takes her own life.

As Liù's body is carried off, Turandot confronts Calàf. She is angered by his resoluteness but increasingly thrilled by his presence. His response is a passionate kiss. Feeling true love for the first time, the princess weeps, and Calàf, convinced he has won her heart, whispers his name to her. He is now at her mercy: how will Turandot respond? She announces to the crowd that she knows his name: it is, she says, "Love." They embrace, and all hail the power of love. Fervently, the crowd declares that love is the sun, eternity, and the light of the world.

Synopsis by Betsy Schwarm, author of the *Classical Music Insights* series



Tamara Wilson as Turandot in 2022 in Robert Wilson's minimalist production



Giacomo Puccini as a Young Man - Puccini Museum

## History: Composer Biography

### GIACOMO PUCCINI (DECEMBER 22, 1858-NOVEMBER 29, 1924)

Born in Lucca, Italy into a family of musicians, Puccini became interested in music at an early age. His father, who directed music at the local cathedral, died when Puccini was just five years old. Puccini studied music as a child and, eventually, earned money playing the organ at various churches. At the age of seventeen, he saw a performance of Verdi's *Aida* in Pisa, sparking his interest in opera. Puccini understood his attraction to opera as a divine calling, saying, "God touched me with His little finger and said, 'Write for the theater, only for the theater'."

Puccini studied at the Milan Conservatory from 1880 to 1883 and worked hard to compose his first opera, hoping to avoid the fate of becoming a music teacher and not a composer.

He premiered his first opera in 1884, shortly after graduation, catching the attention of Giulio Ricordi, an important music publisher who would become the composer's life-long friend and supporter.

In 1893, Puccini achieved international success with his third opera, *Manon Lescaut*, and his reputation only increased with the operas that followed, *La bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), and *Madama Butterfly* (1907).

Throughout his life, Puccini looked for dramatic stories to adapt into operas. "If only I could find my subject, a subject full of passion and pain," he declared. The composer found an

*(Continued on next page)*





Giacomo Puccini c.1908 - Library of Congress

## History: Composer Biography (continued)

ideal story in the French drama *La Tosca* (1887) by Victorien Sardou. Sardou's play about a diva's desperate, failed attempt to save her lover offered the kind of rich depiction of "passion and pain" Puccini sought for his operas. The composer turned again to theatre for his subject matter in *La fanciulla del West* (1910), based on David Belasco's play *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905), a story set during the California Gold Rush.

In 1920, librettists Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni suggested Puccini read Carlo Gozzi's play *Turandotte* (1762). Gozzi's play was based on a thirteenth-century tale of a warrior princess in Mongolia who required suitors to defeat her in wrestling before she would consider their proposals of marriage. Puccini asked Adami and Simoni to write a libretto centered on "the amorous passions of Turandot, who has suffered for such a long time under the ashes of her great pride."

The librettists completed their task, but Puccini was hampered by feelings of insecurity

over his ability to create something original. "I don't seem to have any more faith in myself," he wrote. Although feelings of doubt delayed his work, Puccini also experienced moments of confidence. After writing Liù's funeral music, he wrote to Adami saying, "Poor Liù is dead, and I think that the funeral accompaniment has come out well and movingly."

As Puccini worked on the final compositions for the opera, he became plagued by a chronic sore throat. After consulting with several doctors, the composer learned he had cancer of the larynx. He underwent the, then, highly experimental treatment of radiation therapy, followed by surgery. Puccini died from the disease shortly after his treatment, leaving *Turandot* unfinished. The young composer Franco Alfano was later hired to finish the score of Puccini's last opera.

Today, Puccini is one of the most-produced composers in opera, second only to Mozart and Verdi. This season will see over 2,000 performances of his operas worldwide.

# MUSIC

## Expressive Choices

Hear songs from  
the show!

Grade Level: High School (adaptable for other grades)

Time: 30 minutes

Overview: Students use an aria from the opera to explore expressive choices.

Materials for Two Lessons:

- White board
- Computer with internet connection and speakers to play links embedded in lesson
- Optional - ability to display videos along with audio

### COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

#### Standard

3. Theory of Music

#### GLE

2. Analyze structure, use of musical elements, and expressive choices within musical compositions.

### Expressive Choices (30 minutes)

**Description:** Students use "Nessun dorma," the famous aria from *Turandot*, to explore how musical elements (such as amplitude) and expressive qualities (such as dynamics and tempo) are used to reflect expressive intent (Evidence Outcome b).

#### Detailed Steps:

1. In *Turandot*, Princess Turandot must marry Calàf unless she can discover his name before dawn. The princess orders her subjects to find out his name before the next day or face execution. Calàf responds with the aria "Nessun dorma," which means "no one shall sleep."
2. Introduce the video/audio by asking students to listen for how the expressive choices in "Nessun dorma" help convey what Calàf is experiencing in this moment.
3. Play the video of Jonas Kaufmann performing the famous aria.
4. Ask students to describe what they hear in relation to musical elements and expressive choices in connection to the story, focusing specifically on dynamics and tempo.
5. Play the video again, asking students to consider the role of the chorus (chorus begins singing at 1:54). Consider how the section of chorus singing differs from the tenor's solo. Ask students how they feel this section conveys the emotions of the story. How does the number of chorus singers' voices function in relation to the single tenor's (amplitude)? How else might Puccini have conveyed this portion of the story?
6. If desired, have students view the aria as performed by Yusif Eyvazov in The Metropolitan Opera's 2020 production and compare the performances.



# READING, WRITING, AND COMMUNICATING

*Ninth/Tenth Grade Band, Writing and Composition*

Grade Level: High School (adaptable for other grades)

Time: 45 minutes

Overview: Students use the riddles from Turandot as a creative writing prompt

Materials:

- Writing materials

## COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

### Standard

3. Writing and Composition

### GLE

3. Write engaging real or imagined narratives using multiple plot lines

Evidence Outcome iv: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

### Writing and Composition (45 minutes)

#### Detailed Steps:

- Review how the plot of *Turandot* centers on the challenge Princess Turandot issues her suitors: answer three riddles or die. Ask for volunteers to read the riddles on the following page, including the answers: hope, blood, and Princess Turandot.
- Highlight how each of the riddles points to a major theme in the opera.
- Divide the class into groups of 2-4 students. Assign or have each group select a narrative already studied in class. Ask each group to list three major themes in the work.
- Have groups exchange lists. Then, ask each group to write a riddle for each theme on the list they received.
- When finished, ask students to exchange riddles with a different group. Groups must then solve the riddles and list the themes. Once they have deciphered the themes, which by this time will likely differ from the originals, they should craft a narrative using the three themes. (This final step may be done individually or as a group.)

# READING, WRITING, AND COMMUNICATING

(Continued)



## Riddle Number One:

In the gloomy night an iridescent phantom flies. It spreads its wings and rises over dark, infinite humanity! Everyone invokes it, everyone implores it! But the phantom disappears at dawn to be reborn in the heart! And every night it's born and every day it dies!

Answer: *Hope*

## Riddle Number Three:

Ice that sets you on fire and by your own fire is made more icy! Perfectly pure and dark! If it sets you free, it makes you a slave! If it accepts you as a slave, it makes you a King.

Answer: *Turandot*

## Riddle Number Two:

It flickers like flame, and is not flame! Sometimes it rages! It's feverish, impetuous, burning! But idleness changes it to languor! If you're defeated or lost, it grows cold! If you dream of winning, it flames! Its voice is faint, but you listen; it gleams as bright as the sunset!

Answer: *Blood*



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Set design by Allen Charles Klein as pictured in the Lyric Opera of Chicago's 2017 production