



# Viva Voce

## Our Fall Donation Campaign is Underway!

Donate  
On Line

**Please make a tax-deductible contribution to the Opera Guild of Rochester to support our programs in opera education, outreach, and grants to opera performances.**

Our Bravo Nights and Opera Meet-ups are now established and successful parts of our program and we want to continue expanding and attracting new opera fans with your help! **We have reached out to different audiences** this year by helping to sponsor *The Telephone* at the Fringe Festival and supporting Pegasus Early Music's opera production of *Acis and Galatea*. We continue to support Finger Lakes Opera and present our traditional programs.

**You can donate securely** via Pay Pal or mail a check to Opera Guild of Rochester, PO Box 25613, Rochester, NY 14625. Please include an email or other address for your tax receipt.

Levels start at \$50 for an individual and \$80 per couple, but donations in any amount are important and appreciated.

**All donors receive an invitation to the Annual Donor Recital in May**, and those who donate above the *Comprimario* level (\$100) may request extra tickets.

For further information about our programs and activities, see [From Your Opera Guild](#).

**Volunteering** also makes a great contribution!

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## Please also keep in mind that we are a volunteer organization!

You can enjoy the opportunity to meet and work with other opera fans and help sustain the programs you like. Currently we are looking for an assistant treasurer, event helpers, technical back-up and publicity committee volunteers. For information about these jobs or to speak with us about any volunteer interest, write to [operaguildofrochester@gmail.com](mailto:operaguildofrochester@gmail.com) and the appropriate person will contact you.

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Edition *Viva Voce*, October 2019

The Opera Guild of Rochester, Inc. is a 501(c)(3)

charitable organization with a mission to support opera and opera education in the greater Rochester area.

The Guild presents free opera lectures at local libraries, tours to productions of local opera companies and the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, and our popular Beat-the-Blahs, Haskell Rosenberg Memorial Series, at Temple B'rith Kodesh in Brighton.

This newsletter is sent via eMail each month, currently to over 3,000 subscribers. For a free subscription send your contact details, including your eMail address, to [operaguildofrochester@gmail.com](mailto:operaguildofrochester@gmail.com).

Our Website and Facebook pages serve as a clearinghouse for local and regional opera, concert, and recital information, with links to other music organizations in our area. Please visit our Website at [operaguildofrochester.org](http://operaguildofrochester.org).

For up-to-date information on opera-related news and events, please visit us on [facebook.com/OperaGuildofRochester](https://www.facebook.com/OperaGuildofRochester).



Some events are now being recorded. Click the YouTube logo to visit us there.



Reader Article submission deadline for the next issue is the 15th of the previous month.

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## Metropolitan Opera HD Season 2019 - 2020



All showings at 12:55 pm

### **Puccini, *Turandot***

**October 12**

For more info, [click here](#)

Thrilling dramatic soprano Christine Greer takes her fierce portrayal of the title princess, with Yannick Nézet-Séguin on the podium for Franco Zeffirelli's dazzling production of Puccini's final masterpiece. Tenor Roberto Aronica is the mysterious prince Calaf, alongside soprano Eleonora Buratto as Liù and bass-baritone James Morris as Timur. For an essay on Puccini's *Turandot*, [Click Here](#).

### **Massenet, *Manon***

**October 26**

For more info, [click here](#)

Exhilarating soprano Lisette Oropesa returns as the irresistible title character, the tragic beauty who yearns for the finer things in life. Tenor Michael Fabiano is the besotted Chevalier des Grieux, whose desperate love for Manon proves their undoing. Maurizio Benini conducts Massenet's sensual score. For an essay on Massenet's *Manon*, [Click Here](#).

### **Puccini, *Madama Butterfly***

**November 9**

For more info, [click here](#)

Soprano Hui He takes on the heartbreaking title role of the doomed geisha, with tenor Andrea Carlini as the American naval officer who abandons. The great Plácido Domingo makes his role debut as Sharpless, and Pier Giorgio Morandi is on the podium for Anthony Minghella's sweeping production, a perennial audience favorite.

### **Glass, *Akhmatov***

**November 23**

For more info, [click here](#)

Director Phelim McDermott tackles another one of Philip Glass's modern masterpieces, with star countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo as the revolutionary title ruler who transformed ancient Egypt. To match the opera's hypnotic, ritualistic music, McDermott offers an arresting vision that includes a virtuosic company of acrobats and jugglers. Karen Kamensek conducts.

### **Berg, *Wozzeck***

**January 11**

For more info, [click here](#)

After wowing audiences with his astounding production of *Lulu* in 2015, South African artist William Kentridge now focuses his extraordinary visual imagination on Berg's other operatic masterpiece, coming to cinemas for the first time. Met Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin is on the podium for this important event, with baritone Peter Mattei as the disturbed title character. Soprano Elza van den Heever is Wozzeck's unfaithful mate, alongside a commanding cast that also includes tenor Christopher Ventris, bass-baritone Christian Van Horn, and tenor Gerhard Siegel.

### **Gershwin, *Porgy and Bess***

**February 1**

For more info, [click here](#)

One of America's favorite operas - James Robinson's stylish production transports audiences to Catfish Row on the Charleston waterfront, vibrant with the music, dancing, emotion, and heartbreak of its inhabitants. "If you're going to stage Gershwin's opera, this is how," raved the *Guardian* when the new production premiered in London in 2018. David Robertson conducts a dynamic cast, featuring the sympathetic duo of Eric Owens and Angel Blue in the title roles and an all-star ensemble that includes Golda Schultz, Latonia Moore, Denyce Graves, Frederick Ballentine, and Alfred Walker.

### **Handel, *Agrippina***

**February 29**

For more info, [click here](#)

Handel's tale of intrigue and impropriety is set in ancient Rome, with star mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato as the controlling, power-hungry Agrippina and Harry Bicket conducting. Sir David McVicar's production ingeniously reframes the action of this black comedy about the abuse of power to "the

present," where it should loudly resonate. The all-star cast features mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey as Agrippina's son and future emperor Nerone, soprano Brenda Rae as the seductive Poppea, countertenor Iestyn Davies as the ambitious officer Ottone, and bass Matthew Rose as the weary emperor Claudius.

**Wagner, *Der Fliegende Holländer***  
**March 14**

For more info, [click here](#)

The great bass-baritone Sir Bryn Terfel brings his acclaimed portrayal of the doomed sea captain of the title.. Valery Gergiev conducts a new production by François Girard, whose visionary 2013 take on *Parsifal* set the recent Met standard for Wagner stagings. With sweeping sets by John Macfarlane, Girard's new production turns the Met stage into a rich, layered tableau reminiscent of a vast oil painting. The gifted German soprano Anja Kampe, in her Met debut run, is the devoted Senta, whose selfless love is what the Dutchman seeks, with bass Franz-Josef Selig as her father, Daland, and tenor Sergey Skorokhodov as her deserted former lover, Erik.

**Puccini, *Tosca***  
**April 11**

For more info, [click here](#)

Soprano Anna Netrebko, whom the *New York Times* hailed as "magnificent" when she made her role debut as Tosca in 2018, returns as Puccini's explosive diva. Tenor Brian Jagde is the idealistic painter Cavaradossi, and baritone Michael Volle completes the opera's fatal love triangle as the sinister Scarpia. Bertrand de Billy conducts Sir David McVicar's stunning production.

**Donizetti, *Maria Stuarda***  
**May 9**

For more info, [click here](#)

Soprano Diana Damrau, following her triumph as Violetta in last season's new production of Verdi's *La Traviata*, returns as the martyred Mary, Queen of Scots, in Donizetti's bel canto showcase. Star mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton is her imperious rival Queen Elizabeth I, and the silken-voiced tenor Stephen Costello is the noble Earl of Leicester. Maurizio Benini conducts Sir David McVicar's handsome production.

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*Hear it. See it. Feel it.*

**Mozart's *Così fan tutte***  
**October 18 & 20, 2019**

Fidelity is put to the test in Mozart's delightful comedic opera *Così fan tutte* (Women are like that). Will Ferrando and Guglielmo test the bonds of love? Will their fiancées Dorabella and Fiordiligi see through the ruse? Are Don Alfonso and Despina helping or hindering the young lovers? In this effervescent tale of mistaken identities, hilarious disguises, and the angst of young love, will true love win or will it come crashing down?

[Click Here](#) to Buy Tickets

**Leonard Bernstein's *Candide***  
**February 7 & 9, 2020**

A sparkling adaptation of Voltaire's satirical novella, *Candide* melds European operetta, musicals, Latin American dance rhythms, and everything in between into its own eclectic style. Young Candide's tutor believes everything happens for the best. Through war, plague, earthquake, shipwreck, and the Spanish Inquisition, Candide tries to hold onto this optimism. Will he become disillusioned or will he find the best of all possible worlds?

[Click Here](#) to Buy Tickets

## Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* May 1 & 3, 2020

Against a backdrop of intense political unrest, all of Rome is under control of the corrupt police chief Scarpia. When he becomes obsessed with the fiery diva Tosca, she takes a stand in the name of all she holds sacred-art, freedom, and love-in an attempt to free her lover and save herself. Experience the heartbreak, drama, and intrigue of Puccini's timeless masterpiece and enjoy its beloved music. Will love prevail? And at what cost?

[Click Here](#) to Buy Tickets

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## Rochester Academy of Medicine



**2019-20 Salon Concert Schedule**

September 22, 2019  
October 20, 2019  
February 2, 2020  
March 1, 2020  
March 29, 2020

All Performances begin at 2pm

Season Ticket: \$140	Rochester Academy of
Single Ticket: \$30	Medicine
At the door: \$35	1441 East Avenue
	(585) 271-1314
	raom.org

Rebecca Penneys, piano  
Mikhail Kopelman, violin  
Stefan Reuss, cello



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# TRICITIES OPERA

Tickets, call 607-772-0400;

Box office information and to buy online, see [tricitieopera.com/box-office](http://tricitieopera.com/box-office)



October 20th, 2019 - 3pm

## Tosca

October 20th, 2019 - 3pm

The Forum Theatre  
236 Washington St.  
Binghamton, NY 13901

Tri-Cities Opera opens its season with *Tosca*, a tale of romance over politics, featuring a heroic painter, Mario Cavaradossi, a despicable ruler, Baron Scarpia, and an operatic superstar, Floria Tosca herself. Set in Rome in 1800, *Tosca* is one of the most lethal of operas. Will any of the central characters make it to the end alive, hero or villain? The opera will be sung in Italian with English Operatitles.



Sunday, November 10th, 2019 at 3pm

## We Shall Find Peace

Sunday, November 10th, 2019 at 3pm

Tri-Cities Opera Center  
315 Clinton Street  
Binghamton, NY

As part of the Binghamton Philharmonic's Beethoven project to commemorate the composer's 250th birthday, this concert will be in celebration of our veterans, those currently serving the military, and Beethoven, including excerpts from *Fidelio*. More information coming soon.



February 21 & 28, 2020 - 7:30pm  
February 23 & March 1, 2020 - 3:00pm

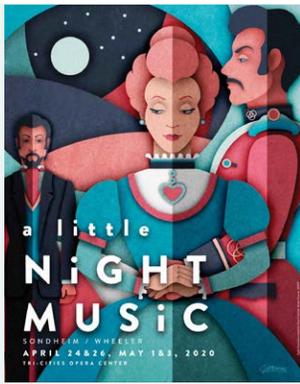
## Marie Begins

February 21 & 28, 2020 - 7:30pm  
February 23 & March 1, 2020 - 3:00pm

Tri-Cities Opera Center  
315 Clinton Street  
Binghamton, NY 13905

Meet Marie, an overwhelmed and under-accomplished woman entering adulthood while mourning her deceased father. Today she realizes it's time to get her life together, and she needs you to help her figure out how she's going to do it. *Marie Begins* is an immersive "Operactive" experience in which you're transformed from passive consumer to active participant through the use of interactive technology - a world premiere! Performances will be accompanied by a jazz trio. The production is directed by Omer ben Seadia and conducted by Michelle Rofrano.

## A Little Night Music



April 24 & May 1, 2020 - 7:30pm  
April 26 & May 3, 2020 - 3:00pm

April 24 & May 1, 2020 - 7:30pm  
April 26 & May 3, 2020 - 3:00pm

Tri-Cities Opera Center  
315 Clinton Street  
Binghamton, NY 13905

Sondheim creates a stunning tour de force when he takes Ingmar Bergman's film, *Smiles of a Summer Night*, and turns it into a musical of masterful execution and elegance. Winner of four Tony Awards, this is a musical work that has forever entranced the world of theatre, including the popular song "Send in the Clowns". The cast includes Kevin Bryant (Henrik), Emily Geller (Desiree), Chelsea Melamed (Charlotte), Gina Moscato (Anne), John Shelhart (Fredrik), and Heidi Weeks (Madame Armfeldt). The production is directed by James Kenon Mitchell, conducted by Joshua Horsch.

**Preview Gala**  
Thursday, May 14, 2020, 7:30PM

**Preview Gala**  
Thursday, May 14, 2020, 7:30PM  
SAVOCA HIBBITT HALL  
TRI-CITIES OPERA CENTER  
315 Clinton Street.  
Binghamton, NY 13905  
Opera does Broadway in this musical review! Our top-notch Resident Artists sing their 'farewell' at this rollicking evening of Broadway favorites! ONE NIGHT ONLY!  
\$29 & \$39 gets you a fantastic show with concessions available in the lobby.

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## EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE 2019-2020 SEASON



**November 7-10**, Kilbourn Hall

***Der Kaiser von Atlantis (The Emperor of Atlantis)***, music by Viktor Ullmann with lyrics by Peter Kien; and ***Mahagonny Songspiel***, music by Kurt Weill and lyrics by Bertolt Brecht-presented in the fall as a double-bill.

**January 23-26, 30-31, and February 1-2**, 804 Annex Blackbox Theatre

***Prima La Musica, Poi le Parole (First the Music, Then the Words)***, music by Antonio Salieri with lyrics by Giovanni Basti; and ***Der Schauspieldirektor (The Impresario)***, music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, lyrics by Gottlieb Stephanie, another double bill.

**April 2-5**, Kodak Hall

***Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street***, with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by Hugh Wheeler.

Tickets are on sale now with **\$24 General Admission**. \$10 student tickets available. Tickets can be purchased at the Eastman Theatre Box Office, 26 Gibbs St.; by phone (585) 274-3000; or online at <http://eastmantheatre.org>.

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**Pegasus 2019-2020 Season**





## A Baroque Noel

December 15, 2019 @ 4 pm  
Hochstein Performance Hall,  
50 N. Plymouth Street, Rochester

Charpentier's beloved *Messe de Minuit pour Noel*, French popular noels, and music by Vivaldi and more, with baroque orchestra.

[Paul O'Dette](#), Director & theorbo  
[Laura Heimes](#), [Shari Alise Wilson](#), sopranos  
[Debi Wong](#), mezzo-soprano  
[Andrew Fuchs](#), [Jonas Budris](#), tenors  
[Andrew Padgett](#), [Steven Hrycelak](#), basses

## "Nevertheless, she persisted"

February 2, 2020 @ 4 pm  
Downtown United Presbyterian Church,  
121 N. Fitzhugh Street, Rochester

Music of strong women, with Laura Heimes, soprano, and chamber ensemble. Music by Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, Antonia Bembo, and George Frideric Handel.

[Laura Heimes](#), soprano  
[Naomi Gregory](#), harpsichord  
[Boel Gidholm](#), violin  
[Deborah Fox](#), theorbo

## The Panther and the Rose

March 15, 2020 @ 4 pm  
Downtown United Presbyterian Church,  
121 N. Fitzhugh Street, Rochester

Medieval music from the Italian trecento: caccias, ballatas, and madrigales by Ciconia, Landini, and more.

[Andrew Rader](#), countertenor  
[Jonas Budris](#), tenor  
[Dongmyung Ahn](#), Vielle  
[Christa Patton](#), harp & recorder  
[Deborah Fox](#), lute

## Diderot Quartet with Jesse Blumberg

May 17, 2020 @ 4 pm  
Downtown United Presbyterian Church,  
121 N. Fitzhugh St. Rochester

Haydn & Mendelssohn quartets plus song arrangements of Clara Schumann & Fanny Mendelssohn

[Jesse Blumberg](#), baritone  
[Diderot String Quartet](#)  
Johanna Novom,  
Adriane Post, violins;  
Kyle Miller, viola;  
Paul Dwyer, cello

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## Royal Opera House Film Series at The Little

### DON GIOVANNI

Sunday Nov 17 (Noon)

Tuesday Nov 19 (6 pm)

### DON PASQUALE

Sunday Dec 1 (Noon)

Tuesday Dec 3 (6 pm)

The Little Royal Opera House Series is sponsored in part by the Rochester Oratorio Society.

**FREE:** informal meet-ups after the Sunday showing in the Little Caf  . All welcome!

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## GREAT OPERA-TUNITIES

(For those wishing to explore opera without spending a lot of money)

**FREE - Friends of Eastman Opera Voice Competition.** Look for listing in February 2020 *Viva Voce*. 8 pm, Kilbourn Hall, Gibbs Street, Rochester.

**FREE - The Lotte Lenya Competition:** young multi-talented singer/actors performing both opera and musical theater selections. See *Viva Voce* for more information about the event being held on Saturday, May 2nd, 2020.

**FREE - Opera Guild Lectures** in September at Fairport Library, February and March (with many video selections) at Brighton Memorial Library, 7 pm, 2300 Elmwood Ave, see elsewhere in this issue for more information.

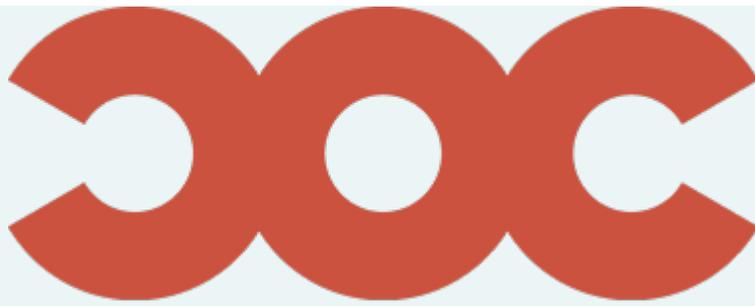
**\$9/10 suggested donation - Opera Guild "Beat the Blahs."** Opera DVD presentations at Temple B'rith Kodesh. Four Sundays in January at 1 pm, see the 2020 schedule next year. Pre-performance talk, refreshments at intermission, children and students always FREE.

**\$24; UR students \$10 with ID - The Eastman Opera Season:** (Eastman voice students). Pre-performance talks; see full listing in *Viva Voce*.

**\$25 per (senior) ticket - Metropolitan Opera simulcasts** in HD of live performances on Saturdays usually at 1 pm. An encore performance, not live, is given on the Wednesday following for \$23. Theaters are at Tinseltown, Eastview, Webster and Henrietta. See full listing and essays in *Viva Voce*.

**FREE - Opera Guild Bravo Nights** at The Little Caf  , live accompanied singers perform opera favorites in an informal atmosphere. See *Viva Voce* for next date.

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# CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

**TURANDOT** September 28, 2019 to October 27, 2019

[Learn More](#)

**RUSALKA** October 12, 2019 to October 26, 2019

[Learn More](#)

**THE BARBER OF SEVILLE** January 19, 2020 to February 7, 2020

[Learn More](#)

**HANSEL & GRETEL** February 6, 2020 to February 21, 2020

[Learn More](#)

**AIDA** April 18, 2020 to May 8, 2020

[Learn More](#)

**THE FLYING DUTCHMAN** May 1, 2020 to May 16, 2020

[Learn More](#)

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## Tweets from your Opera Guild

At the Fringe Festival on Friday evening, September 20, Kerri Slominski, soprano, Mark Falco, baritone, and Alex Kuczynski, pianist, presented Giancarlo Menotti's short opera *The Telephone* (1947) - with a twist. The opera was composed by Menotti apparently because he feared that the then new-fangled device would gravely interfere in interpersonal relationships. (If he were alive today, he would surely realize his nightmare had come true.) The story is that Ben wishes to propose to Lucy, but cannot get her attention long enough because she is glued to her phone. Finally, in desperation, he leaves and telephones her himself. The twist for the modern audience is that Tweets could be sent to Lucy's phone during the opera and she would tweet back. Although I am not a tweeter, the opera itself was well-acted and sung, humorous and enjoyable. Over 400 tweets were received and sent. Here are just a few:



"L'amour a trois?" (This references the opera's subtitle, the third in the love triangle being the telephone.)

"You're better off without George. Go get Ben!" (Lucy has an argument with George on the phone and there are hints of an attachment between them.)

"Ugh - Benny Bear has been traveling for work soooooo much! He better have picked up something from Tiffany's or he's sleeping on the couch!" From Lucy.

And finally: "A big thank you to Opera Guild and Elmgrove United Methodist Church for your support for tonight's performance! XOXO." It's great to get those kisses and hugs!

It was gratifying as always to see the fruition of a project supported by the Guild. We cannot do it without your help. Our fall campaign is under way - please contribute! Your thank-you is an invitation to our Annual Recital and kisses and hugs could also be available!

Carol Crocca  
President

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## Puccini's *Turandot* The Story of the Story

Today, when we think of "Turandot," we think of Puccini's depiction of the cold-hearted, man-hating woman, beautiful and cruel. But the story is much older than Puccini, and the previous Turandots were quite different from Puccini's Ice Princess.

We can start with a sort of real-life "proto-Turandot," described by Marco Polo in his *Travels* (ca. 1300). Her name was Khutulun, warrior daughter of a certain Mongol Khan Kaidu and niece of the legendary Kublai Khan. Khutulun refused to marry any man who could not defeat her in wrestling, exacting the price of a certain number of horses, not death, for any loser. According to Polo, she remained unmarried, much to her parents' displeasure.

Another version of the tale of Turandot first appears in Europe in a 1712 collection of Persian tales, translated by a French scholar named François Pétis de la Croix, and published under the title *The Thousand and One Days*. Subsequent research found that this work was an adaptation and translation of a 15<sup>th</sup> century Turkish collection, including "Prince Khalaf and the Princess of China," which is a version of the tale we are all familiar with: the infatuated prince and the princess who doesn't want to marry.

Further scholarship traces de la Croix's tale in part back to a 12<sup>th</sup> century epic *Haft Peykar (The Seven Beauties)*, a work of 12<sup>th</sup>-century Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi. In this story the Princess is Russian. While Nizami's tale possibly pre-dates Marco Polo's account of Khutulun, there's a consensus that de la Croix's Chinese Turandot is partly based on Polo's account of the Mongolian Khutulun as well as Nizami's.

The tale then gets taken up by the 18<sup>th</sup> century Venetian playwright Carlo Gozzi. He was an advocate of the traditional *commedia dell'arte*, an early form of professional theatre, highly stylized, featuring traditional social types and stock characters, such as foolish old men, devious servants, or military officers full of false bravado. These characters wore characteristic costumes and were referred to as "masks." Productions were improvised and sometimes actually unscripted, and often were very satirical.

Gozzi wrote a series of *Fiabe Teatrali*, (*Tales for the Theater*). One of these was *Turandot*, based on the story from de la Croix's collection. It was written in the *commedia dell'arte* form and was a comedy, described as having a "light, sarcastic tone." It premiered in Venice in 1762.

*Turandot*, like most of Gozzi's other *fiabe*, was highly successful. The play was adapted by other playwrights and composers. Most importantly, it was translated into German and adapted by the German poet, philosopher, and playwright Friedrich Schiller who lived from 1759 to 1805. Schiller's *Turandot* premiered in 1801. He is an important figure in 19<sup>th</sup> century opera as several of his plays were adapted for music drama: these include Verdi's *Don Carlo*, *I Masnadieri*, *Simon Boccanegra*, and *Luisa Miller*; Rossini's *William Tell*; Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* and others.

Puccini first began working on *Turandot* in March 1920 after meeting with librettists Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, who provided him with a copy of Schiller's adaptation of the Gozzi play. After reading it, Puccini instructed them to begin work on it, but with two important modifications. One was the addition of the character of Liù, the devoted slave-girl, faithful unto death; the second was the elimination of the *commedia dell'arte* characters that Gozzi had inserted and Schiller kept. As it turned out, the role of Liù became central. The 'masks' were retained in a highly subdued fashion as Ping, Pang and Pong, the Royal functionaries (who end up revealing their true humanity in Act 2).

Puccini's *Turandot* is very different from all of her predecessors. In Gozzi's and Schiller's versions. *Turandot* is determined not to marry, but the reasons are quite different from Puccini's. Gozzi's *Turandot*

says, "I am not heartless. But I abhor your sex, and I defend myself in the only way I know, so that I may remain free from men. Why should I not be as free as you are?" Schiller, in keeping with his enlightened philosophy, has her say, "I am not cruel, as they say, but shun the yoke of Man's despotic sway. In virgin freedom would I live and die. Shall I, the daughter of an emperor, not have that birthright which belongs to all?"

But Puccini's Turandot explains herself in the aria "In questa reggia," in which she relates how, thousands of years ago, her ancestress, Princess Lou-Ling, was "dragged away / by a man like you, like you./ stranger, there in the terrible night / where her young voice was stifled!" And so, because of an event "thousands of years ago" Turandot has hated men and rejoiced as they gave their lives for her.

So how did Gozzi's and Schiller's models of feminist independence turn into the cruel albeit breathtakingly beautiful princess? And from where came the slave girl LiÃ¹, who does not appear in any of the predecessors at all?

In 1903, Puccini and his wife Elvira had established a home in the town of Torre del Lago in Tuscany. A 16-year-old village girl named Doria Manfredi came to work for them as a servant. Elvira formed the notion that Puccini and Doria were having an affair. Puccini denied it and there was no evidence of such. Elvira spied upon and hounded the girl until she left their service. Elvira continued to hound and harass the girl whenever they met in the village. Doria became reclusive, fearing to leave her home. She appears to have been under suspicion even in her own home. She finally committed suicide in 1909, by swallowing a corrosive poison. It took 5 days for her to die, in terrible pain. A subsequent autopsy on the girl confirmed that she was a virgin. Criminal and civil charges were lodged against Elvira; Puccini paid a great deal of money in fines and penalties.

The affair affected Puccini deeply, and it has been suggested that in his version of Turandot, the Princess of Fire and Ice is patterned after Elvira and the faithful LiÃ¹ after poor little Doria. Puccini didn't live to complete the opera, having composed only up to the death of LiÃ¹ in Act 3. The work was completed by the composer Franco Alfano.

And so this tale that begins in 12<sup>th</sup> century Persia evolves into one of Puccini's most intensely personal statements. One which he, sadly, never lived to complete.

*Art Axelrod for the Opera Guild of Rochester  
September 2019*

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## **Massenetique**

### **Carol Crocca**

Graceful, suave, warm, elegant and flowing...*Massenetique*.\* The French have a word for it, part of their musical lexicon describing the essence of Massenet, one of the most popular French composers. His masterpieces, *Manon* (1884), *Werther* (1892) and *Cendrillon* (1899) are still in the major repertoire.

Jules Massenet (1842-1912) provided a steady supply of remarkably original and varied works for the Paris stage in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, between those other pillars of French opera, Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) and Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande* (1902). This was *La Belle Ãpoque*, a period of European history between two wars characterized by optimism, peace, economic prosperity and, especially in Paris, a flourishing of the arts.

Massenet was trained at the Paris Conservatory, influenced by Meyerbeer, Berlioz, Gounod, and his teacher, Ambrose

Thomas. He composed sacred dramas, French grand opera, intimate tragedies, veristic dramas, comedies, and works of ambiguous genre such as the magical opera *Esclarmonde* (1889), *Thaïs* (1894), and the medieval parable, *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* (1902). The last two exemplify his proclivity for setting human passion against a religious background - this contrast is found in some of his most successful works. But

Massenet's fondness for religious scenes was derived not from faith but simply from an acute sense of the dramatic in religious ritual and devotions, a striking feature of Catholicism.

-[New Penguin Opera Guide](#), Amanda Holden, ed., Penguin books, New York and London, 2001, p 542.

A trait, it could be argued, that he shared with Verdi.

*Manon* is a tale based on [L'histoire de Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut](#) (1731) by Abbé Prévost, sometimes considered the first French novel. (This work also figured in Dumas' *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* book, *La dame aux camillias*, his autobiographical account of his affair with a courtesan who reads the Prévost novel; Dumas' book in turn was the source of the eponymous play on which Verdi based, in part, *La traviata*.) In the opera *Manon*, the character of Manon is softened and made more sympathetic than in the Prévost work and she is the focus of the drama, whereas in the original story Des Grieux is the protagonist, who falls into ruin through his relationship with the debauched young woman. In the opera, Manon begins as an innocent young girl, seeking romance but attracted, as young girls often are, by the glittering world of the rich and socially elevated. Her conflict is a version of the religion-versus-human passion theme of some of his other operas, but has become a conflict between hedonism and celebrity on the one hand and true love on the other. Des Grieux is the faithful lover, passionate and true, but ineffective in maintaining the relationship against the lure of wealth. Here is Piotr Beczala, noted tenor, on how and why he interprets that role:

I really try to show my Des Grieux as very honest good man, because his music is amazingly pure and honest. This is my rule when I'm doing opera, I try to relate to a character according to the music....[D]es Grieux's music is really simple and direct, his story is touching, his love for Manon is priceless, and I try to portray him in this way.

-[Opera Lively - The Interviews](#), Gazzola, Luis, Opera Lively Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 2012, p.44.

In her first appearance, Manon directly expresses her conflict between a worldly existence and the convent life she is apparently destined for. Massenet then creates contrasting scenes which skillfully dramatize the tension between her true passion for Des Grieux and her longing for pleasure and luxury. Their life in the Parisian love nest is followed by the parade of the rich and famous on the Cours-la-Reine, that boulevard in the city (which still exists) where merchants, noble ladies, courtesans and their suitors abound, and where Manon glories in the admiration and envy of all. The religious atmosphere of St-Sulpice, where Manon woos Des Grieux away from his resolve to devote himself to God, is followed by the brittle gaiety of the gaming tables at the Hotel de Transylvanie.

Like many 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century young women who try to escape the destinies chosen by their parents, Manon comes to a tragic end. But Massenet's sweeping romantic music has insured that her story is still told. It quickly became popular on the world's stages and remained in the Opéra-Comique's repertoire almost without interruption until 1959.

\*The term "*Massenetique*" and its description are from [Ticket to the Opera](#), Goulding, Phil G., Random House, New York and Toronto, 1996, p. 239.

General reference, [New Penguin Opera Guide](#), Amanda Holden, ed., Penguin books, New York and London, 2001.

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