



Giacomo Puccini

Composer of the Week



Giacomo Puccini
(1858-1924)







Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini must have one of the longest names of any composer.

Along with **Verdi** he is one of the great composers of Italian opera.



He was born in Lucca, Italy to a musical family. Puccini's great-great-grandfather (also called Giacomo) was the organist at the Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca. A post held by each generation for 124 years. Puccini's father died when he was only 6 years old and the Cathedral decided to hold the post of organist open until the young Giacomo was old enough.



In 1876, when he was 18 years old, Verdi walked to the town on Pisa to see a production of Verdi's **Aida**. He said that he knew immediately that he must be an opera composer.

**Madam
Butterfly**

**Manon
Lescaut**


**The Girl of the Golden
West**

Sour Angelica

Tosca

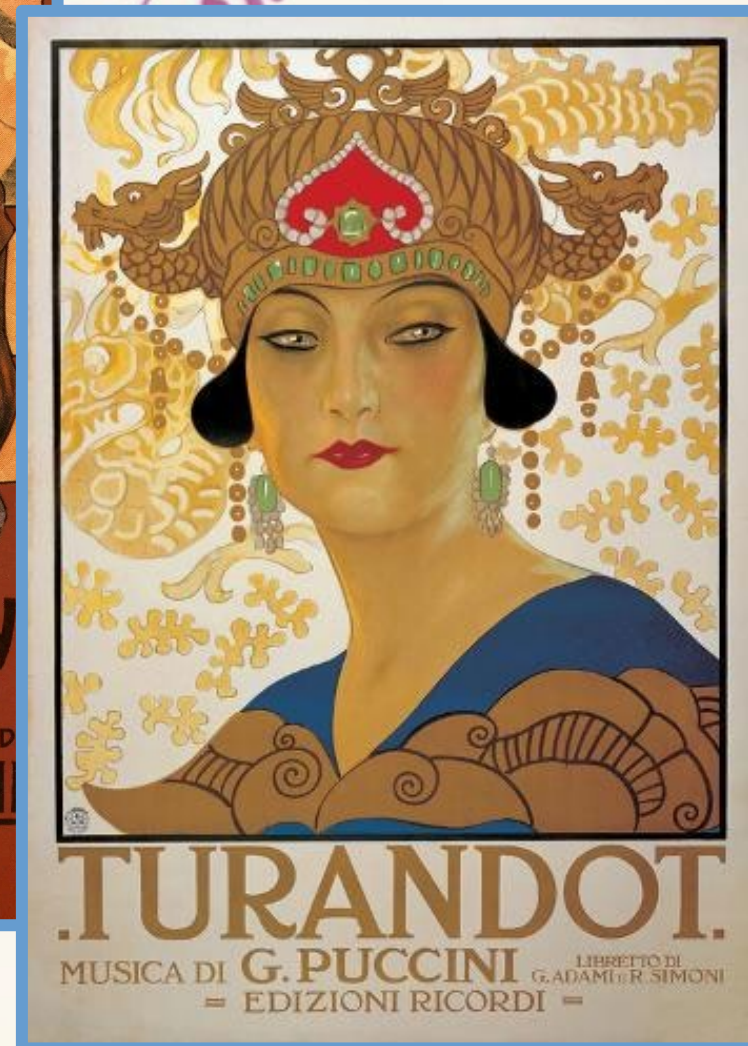
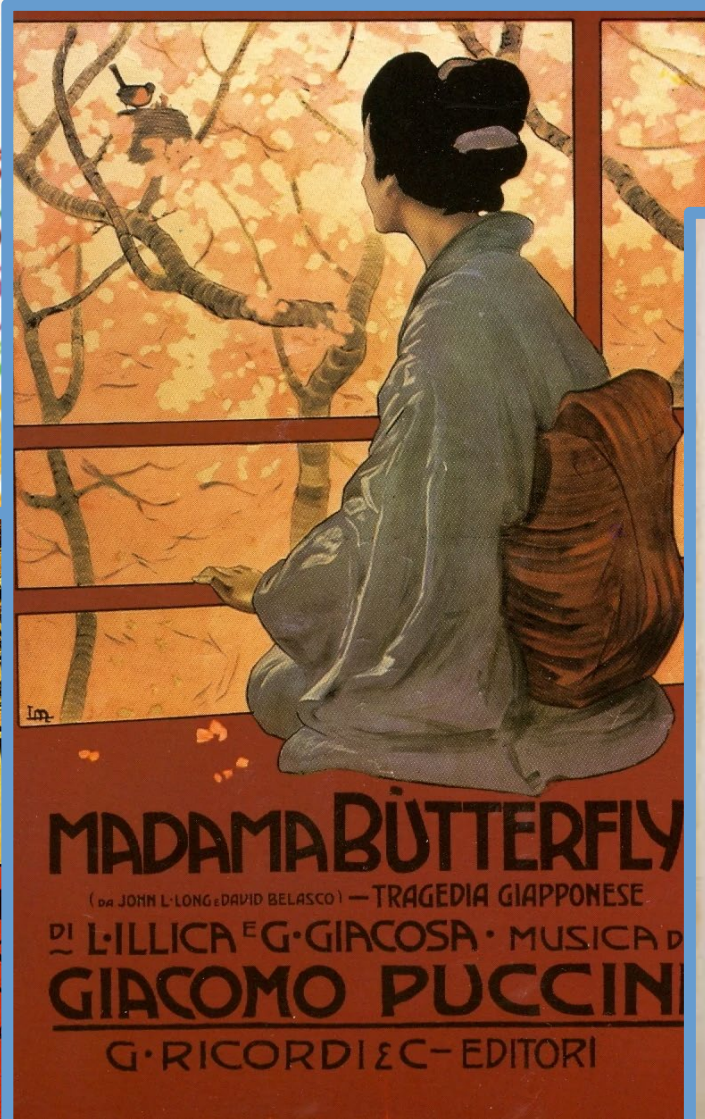
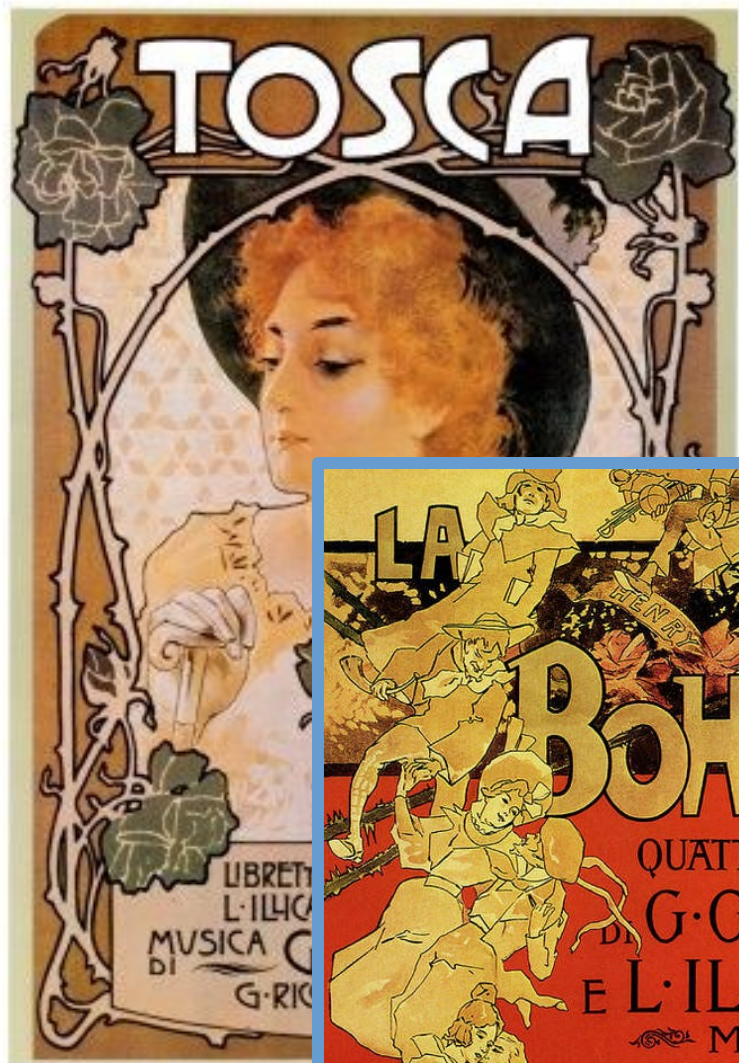
Turandot

Puccini's operas are still the most popular and most often performed. He nearly always used stories which involved female heroines, who often died at the end of the opera.

A background illustration featuring a large, brown tree trunk at the bottom. The upper part of the image is filled with a light blue sky and a dense collection of colorful musical notes and instruments, including trumpets, saxophones, and various note heads in shades of blue, green, yellow, and red. The entire scene is framed by a thin blue border.

Puccini was very fortunate that the publisher Giulio Riccordi heard an early opera and thought he showed promise. The Ricordi company decided to look after the young composer and they publish his works to this day.

The posters they produced to advertise Puccini's operas are evocative of the art of the time and are still printed and collected today.



Unlike his predecessors, Puccini chose subjects that were close to real life. One of his most famous operas, **La Boheme**, deals with the problems faced by a young artist, a poet and a musician all living in a flat together in Paris. Just like the young Puccini in Milan.

He used every day dialogue and situations for his arias (songs).

Listen to **Mimi**'s first meeting with **Rudolfo**.

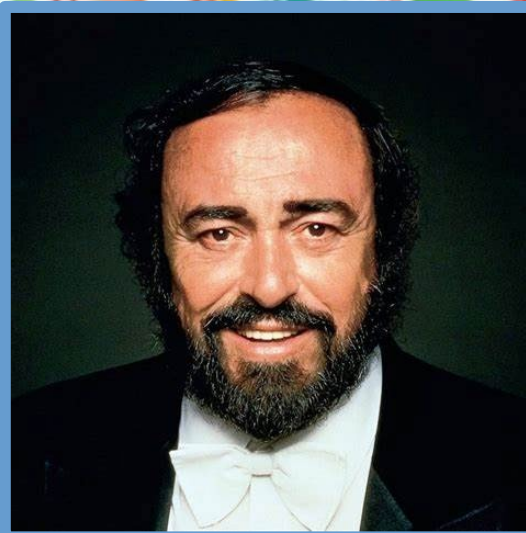


Rudolfo bumps into Mimi on the stairs, he touches her hand and sings an aria (song) about how cold her hands are.

At the end, he asks her name, and she replies that people call her Mimi but her name is Lucia.



Do you remember the
name of this singer?

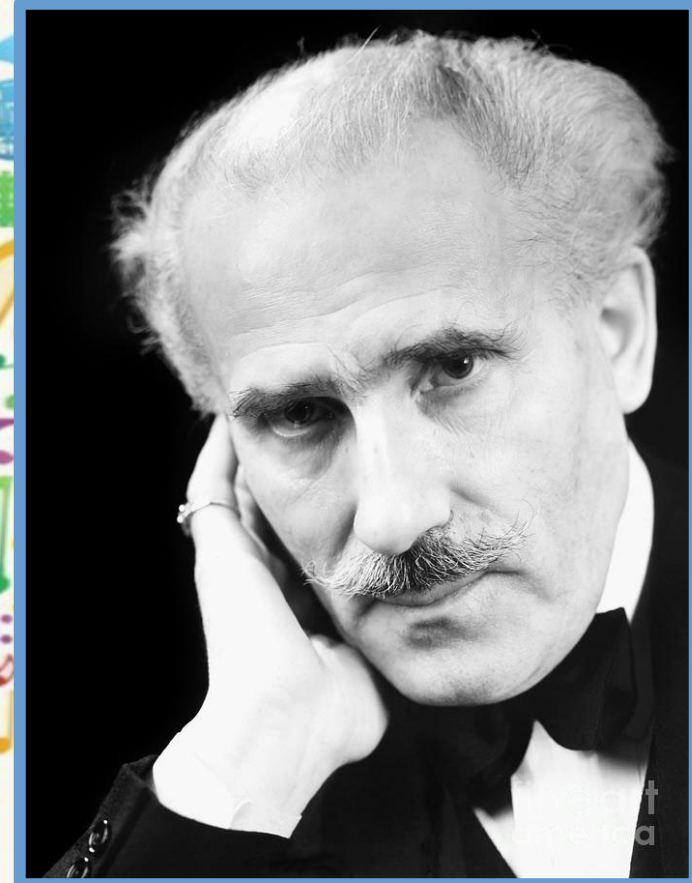


Luciano Pavarotti

La Boheme was an immediate success. The first performance was **conducted** by **Arturo Toscanini**.

A **conductor** keeps the whole opera going. He makes sure the orchestra and singers stay together and that everything makes sense musically and dramatically.

Toscanini is one of the most famous conductors to have lived and he conducted the first performance of many **Verdi** operas and most of Puccini's works.



Puccini's next opera was **Tosca**. This was also incredibly successful and it is still one of the most performed operas. Puccini was well able to compose grand opera scenes like Verdi. This is the **Te Deum** at the end of the first Act.

Tosca is an opera singer who is in love with a painter, **Cavaradossi**. Cavaradossi is a revolutionary and is despised by **Scarpia**, the chief of police.

Scarpia is also in love with Tosca, he plots to arrest and kill Cavaradossi so he can have Tosca to himself, while in church there is a Te Deum, giving thanks that Napoleon has just been beaten in battle.

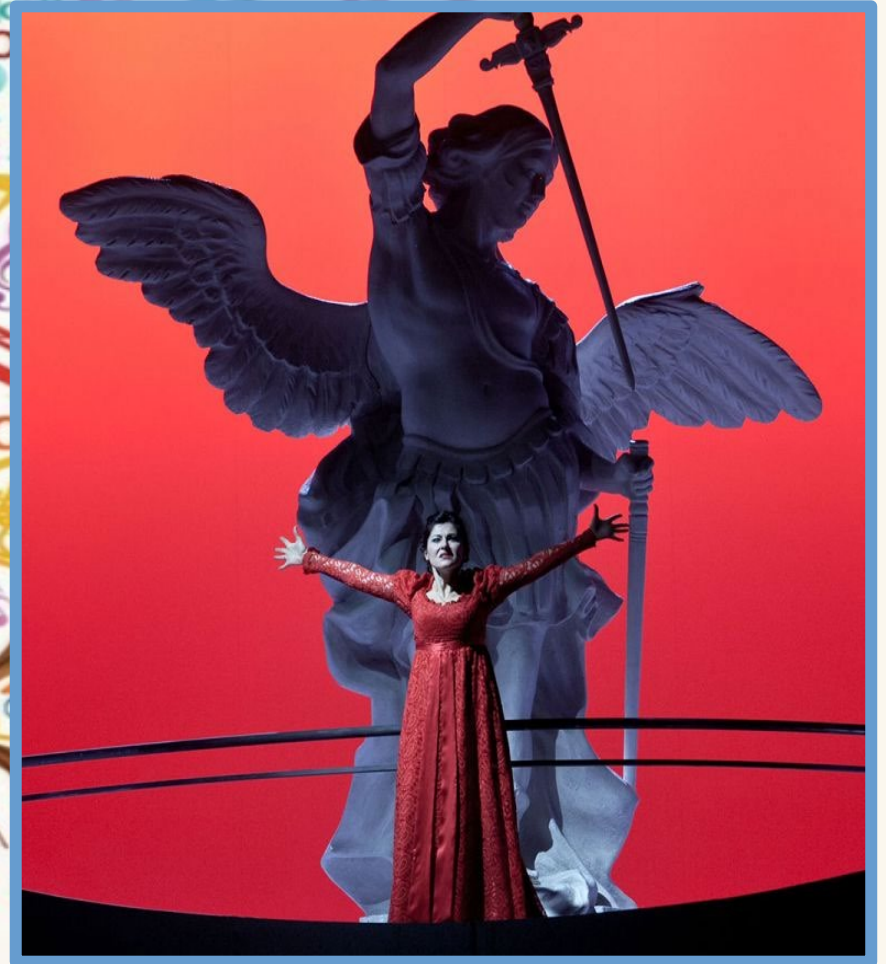
Can you hear a canon?



At the end of the opera, Tosca discovers that Scarpia has indeed killed Cavaradossi, even though he promised her he would not, and she throws herself off the battlements of Castel Sant 'Angelo into the river Tiber below.



Often in productions, the singer throws herself off the battlements and lands on a pile of mattresses, unseen by the audience. There is a famous story about a production in New York where the mattresses were replaced by a trampoline and it is said that the singer bounced back up at least fifteen times.



In his opera, **Madame Butterfly**, Puccini used some Japanese melodies, sent to him by the wife of the Japanese Ambassador to Italy.

This is a good example – here he asks the chorus to hum all the way through. It's quite difficult to do, especially when the music is high. You try!



Puccini's final opera was **Turandot**. Set in China, Puccini based some of the music on traditional Chinese melodies.

Puccini was taken ill before the opera was completed, he died with a copy of the score in his hands. It was completed by Franco Alfano using sketches Puccini had left.

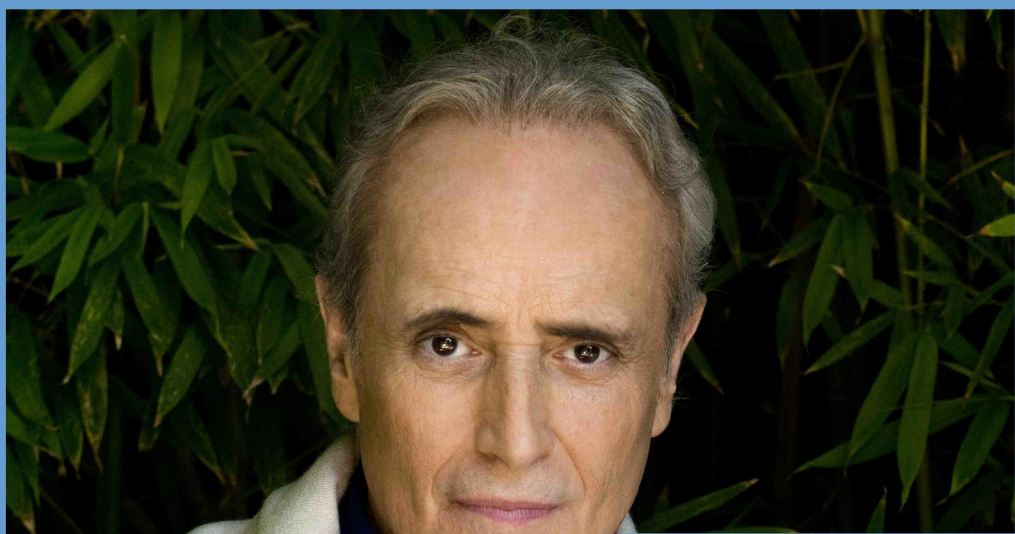
In the first performance, the conductor, **Arturo Toscanini**, came to the point Puccini died, stopped, and put his baton down.

A background illustration of a tree with a brown trunk and a canopy of colorful musical notes and instruments like a trumpet, guitar, and saxophone.

In 1990 the football World Cup was in Italy. Luciano Pavarotti, who was a huge football fan, organised a concert to celebrate this with two of his friends, who also just happened to be world-famous singers.

This concert was seen live all over the world and The Three Tenors became known by everyone.

They were:



**Jose
Carreras**



**Placido
Domingo**



Luciano Pavarotti

Pavarotti sang an aria from **Turandot, Nessun Dorma** (None Shall Sleep) that is now well-known by everyone – the final phrase, *vincero*, means Victory!

