

Puccini: Turandot Synopsis

Act I

A crowd assembled by the walls of the Imperial palace in Peking listens to a Mandarin reading a decree – anyone who wishes to win the hand of Princess Turandot must solve three riddles; whosoever cannot answer must die. The young Prince of Persia is to be executed this night. The excited crowd rushes towards the palace, but the guards keep the people back. An old man falls to the ground. In anguish, a young girl calls for help. A young man rushes out from the crowd, recognising the old man to be his father. Their unexpected meeting is not a joyful occasion – old Timur's enemies have usurped his throne and banished him from his native land; his son Calaf has been forced to wander foreign parts, hiding his name from everyone. Timur is accompanied everywhere by the faithful slave girl Liù, whose love for Calaf is unrequited. Preparations for the execution are underway on the square. Night descends. As the moon rises, the crowd awaits the appearance of Turandot. A triumphal procession approaches. It is met by a funeral procession – that of the Prince of Persia going to his execution. The people feel pity for him and beg Turandot to have mercy on him. Calaf vengefully curses the hard-hearted Princess. Finally, however, she appears, and Calaf is blinded by her beauty. In vain, his father tries to dissuade him: Calaf knows he must win Turandot's heart. Suddenly the ministers Ping, Pong and Pang bar his way. They warn the Prince and jeer at him, summoning the spirits of those who have died from their love of Turandot. Liù begs Calaf to leave – neither she nor his father could bear to see him die. Calaf is touched by her entreaties, but cannot relinquish his love for Turandot. At his signal, a servant strikes a huge gong three times, declaring Calaf's decision to attempt to win the Princess.

Act II Scene 1

Ping, Pong and Pang are pondering the fate of the unknown Prince who has decided to solve Turandot's riddles: what will dawn bring – a wedding or an execution? They dream of returning to a peaceful and tranquil life, far, far away from the Imperial palace. But madmen in love continue to try their luck, and their heads continue to roll in honour of the Princess. When will the suitor come who will defeat Turandot, who can transform her by love and put an end to these perpetual executions in the country?

Scene 2

The crowd gathers on the square before the palace. Timur and Liù are also there. At last, Emperor Altoum appears. He tries to dissuade the Prince from the attempt. The Mandarin repeats once again the dreadful conditions of the challenge.

Turandot appears at the head of a triumphal procession. She is consumed with hatred of all men: once, many thousands of years ago, in this very palace, a foreign invader ravaged a Chinese Princess and, centuries later, her cry resounded in Turandot's heart. She takes vengeance on all strangers for this evil act. No-one may marry her: there will be three riddles followed by one death. But Calaf answers her proudly that there will be

three riddles followed by one life...

Turandot announces her first riddle: what bright, alluring vision is created at night and dies at dawn, only to return the next night? The Prince answers that it is the hope that will bring him to Turandot. The wise men confirm that hope is indeed the answer to the first riddle – it is written thus in their scrolls. The second riddle is announced: what is like a flame, yet is not a flame? What runs cold when a man dies, but burns hotter than the sun if he succeeds? In his confusion, Calaf is silent. The Emperor, Liù and the crowd encourage him and he finds the answer – it is the blood that flows in his veins from his love for Turandot. The Princess is struck with rage and fear and she hurries to pose her third riddle: what is like ice but freezes in fire? What makes a man a slave if he wants to be free and makes him a King if he becomes its servant? In triumph, Turandot mocks the Prince. What kind of ice could he burn in? However, Calaf solves the third riddle: it is Turandot, and the ice of her heart will melt in the fire of his love. The crowd praises the victor. In terror, Turandot begs her father not to marry her to the stranger, but the Emperor is unyielding – his word is sacred. Calaf, however, will not accept Turandot's hand against her will as he desires the Princess' love. He sets Turandot just one riddle which she must solve by daybreak: in all Peking not one person knows his name. If the Princess can discover it, he will die willingly.

Act III Scene 1

The sounds of far-off heralds can be heard in the garden of the Imperial palace – Turandot has decreed that none shall sleep this night in Peking on pain of death; the name of the unknown Prince must be discovered by daybreak. Calaf dreams of Turandot's love: she will only know the answer to his secret when he holds her in his arms. Daybreak will bring his victory.

Ping, Pong and Pang tempt Calaf with the delights of love, wealth and ultimately compassion – thousands will be tortured to death if Turandot does not know his name by dawn. But Calaf firmly resists all their temptations: the entire world may perish, but he will not be denied Turandot. Liù declares that she alone knows the Prince's name and nothing will make her reveal the secret. Turandot is confounded by the slave girl's courage. Where does she get her strength? It comes from the power of love for which Liù is ready to die. Turandot will know it herself soon, though Liù will not live to see this – snatching a dagger from Turandot, she stabs herself. Timur and the crowd are broken-hearted at Liù's death. With ardent words and kisses, Calaf awakens the love in Turandot's icy heart. The stranger's courage and passion have defeated her pride – now she is his. And so, the Prince tells Turandot his name. Night passes and the sun begins to rise.

Scene 2

Before the assembled crowd and in the presence of the Emperor, Turandot gives the answer to Calaf's riddle: his name is... love.

Everyone sings in praise of love, light and life.

ジャコモ・プッチーニ

トゥーランドット

作品解説

小畑 恒夫 = 音楽評論家
Tsuneo Obata



ジャコモ・プッチーニ

寓話 — リアリズムではない題材

ジャコモ・プッチーニ(1858-1924)が詩人レナート・シモーニに勧められてゴッツィの戯曲『トゥーランドット』に目を通したのは1920年のことだった。カルロ・ゴッツィはゴルドーニと同じく18世紀のヴェネツィアで活躍した劇作家で、寓話を題材に異国情緒に満ちた幻想的な劇を書き残した。姫君と結婚できる者は3つの謎を解いた王族に限られ、謎解きに失敗すれば容赦なく首を切られるという寓話はもともと『千夜一夜物語』にあったが、ゴッツィはそれを中国に移し、そこにコンメーディア・デッラルテ風の登場人物も加えて独特の世界を作っていた。ゴッツィの幻想性は19世紀のロマン主義者たちにアピールしたらしく、『蛇女』はワーグナーのオペラ《妖精》の原作になり、ドイツの詩人シラーは『トゥーランドット』を翻案してドイツ語のドラマを作った。プッチーニはこのシラーの戯曲のイタリア語訳を読んだらしい。

20世紀に入るとオペラの題材を探すのがますます難しくなり、300年以上続いてきたオペラという芸術そのものが、そろそろ存続の危機を迎えていた。プッチーニは《ラ・ボエーム》《トスカ》《蝶々夫人》など、さまざまな愛のかたちを美しいメロディと雄弁なオーケストラで描いてきたが、面白いことに、彼が選んだ題材は、サルドウーの『トスカ』、ベラスコの『蝶々夫人』『西部の娘』など、すでに舞台上で成功しているものがほとんどだった。つまり彼は成功間違いなしのストーリーでオペラを作ったのだ。しかしこの路線でどこまでやって行けるだろうか。社会が急速に変化しているのに、同じことのくり返していいのだろうか。今度の『トゥーランドット』は荒唐無稽な寓話で、それまでプッチーニが追求してきたリアリ

ムではないし、大衆的人気を得た作品でもない。おそらく作曲家の内面で何かが成熟し、それまでのメロドラマとは違って、同じ愛を描くにも、究極の愛の勝利といった、もっと哲学的なものを描きたいという欲求が高まったのだ。

作曲の進行、台本の変更

プッチーニはこの物語を気に入り、この題材を勧めてきたシモーニと、気心の知れた台本作者アダミーの2人に、台本の制作を依頼した。プッチーニが台本にうるさい作曲家であることはよく知られていた。なぜなら彼は迷う作曲家だったからだ。決して自信に満ちた人ではなく、作曲が進まなくなるとすぐにアイデアを変え、台本を作り直したくなる。被害を被るのは詩人で、明確な指示のない作曲家の気まぐれな要求に、とてもひとりでは対応しきれない。《ラ・ボエーム》から《蝶々夫人》まではイリカとジャコーザという2人の詩人が台本を担当した。イリカが主にドラマの構成を考え、ジャコーザは主に洗練された詩を作り出したという。この「詩人2人体制」はリコルディ出版社が考え出した苦肉の策だった。

《トゥーランドット》の共同台本作者になったアダミーとシモーニも、かつてのイリカとジャコーザのような苦しみを味わった。プッチーニと詩人たちの最初の構想は全3幕で、音楽には中国の楽器や旋律を取り入れ、トゥーランドット姫の愛を刺激する人物を追加し、愛が姫の心を180度変えてしまう劇的なフィナーレを置くというものだった。1921年の初めに「謎解き」を含む第1幕の台本ができあがり、プ