Week 14: Italian Mastermind: Puccini Part 2

1. **What opera by Puccini premiered at the Grand Theatre de Monte Carlo on March 27, 1917?**
   
   **A: La rondine**

   *La rondine* (The Swallow) was initially conceived as an operetta, but Puccini eliminated spoken dialogue, rendering the work closer in form to opera. A modern reviewer described *La rondine* as "a continuous fabric of lilting waltz tunes, catchy pop-styled melodies, and nostalgic love music," while characterizing the plot as recycling characters and incidents from works like *'La traviata'* and *'Die Fledermaus'."

   Final scene of Act 3 of a 2009 Metropolitan Opera production of *La rondine*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSkIQLkoymE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSkIQLkoymE)

   *La rondine* had its Cincinnati Opera debut in 1973 and was last seen in 1984.

2. **Il trittico** is composed of three one-act operas, each concerning the concealment of a death, which one is **not** a part of it?
   
   A. *Il tabarro*
   B. *Suor Angelica*
   C. *Il Purgatorio*
   D. *Gianni Schicchi*

   In 1918, *Il trittico* (The Triptych) premiered in New York in December 14, 1918. This work is composed of three one-act operas, each concerning the concealment of a death: a horrific episode (*Il tabarro*) in the style of the Parisian Grand Guignol, a sentimental tragedy (*Suor Angelica*), and a comedy (*Gianni Schicchi*). Initially, Puccini had planned each opera to reflect on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, but decide to base it only on *Gianni Schicchi*.

   Ermonela Jaho sings ‘Senza mamma” from Royal Opera House’s 2015 production of *Suor Angelica*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTB2OvpC1W0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTB2OvpC1W0)

   *Il tabarro* had its Cincinnati Opera debut in 1975 and was last seen in 1982. *Suor Angelica* had its Cincinnati Opera debut in 1975 and was last seen in 1982. *Gianni Schicchi* had its Cincinnati Opera debut in 1975 and was last seen in 2012.
3. How did Puccini pass away?
   A: Car accident
   B: Heart Attack
   C: Suicide
   D: Murdered

A chain smoker of Toscano cigars and cigarettes, Puccini began to complain of chronic sore throats towards the end of 1923. A diagnosis of throat cancer led his doctors to recommend a new and experimental radiation therapy treatment, which was being offered in Brussels.

Puccini died in Brussels on November 29, 1924 at aged 65, from complications after the treatment; uncontrolled bleeding led to a heart attack the day after surgery. News of his death reached Rome during a performance of La bohème. The opera was immediately stopped, and the orchestra played Chopin's Funeral March for the stunned audience.

Luciano Pavarotti and Fiamma Izzo d’Amico sing “O soave fanciulla” from La Bohème: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= pzPW8mXX3bg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzPW8mXX3bg)

4. What was Puccini’s third opera?
   A: Manon Lescaut

The first performance of Manon Lescaut took place in the Teatro Regio in Turin on February 1, 1893; it was Puccini’s third opera and his first great success. The opera was first performed at the Metropolitan Opera on January 18, 1907 in the presence of the composer with Lina Cavalieri in the title role, Enrico Caruso as des Grieux, Antonio Scotti as Lescaut, and Arturo Vigna conducting.

Jonas Kaufmann sings “Donna non vidi mai” from a 2014 Royal Opera House production of Manon Lescaut: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esoABheVgcA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esoABheVgcA)

Manon Lescaut made its Cincinnati Opera debut in 1959 and was last seen in 1991.
5. What famous opera was Puccini working on when he passed away?

A: *Turandot*

When Puccini died, the first two of the three acts were fully composed, including orchestration. Puccini had composed and fully orchestrated Act 3 up until Liù's death and funeral cortège. In the sense of finished music, this was the last music composed by Puccini. He left behind 36 pages of sketches on 23 sheets for the end of *Turandot*. Some sketches were in the form of "piano-vocal," including vocal lines with "two to four staves of accompaniment with occasional notes on orchestration." These sketches supplied music for some, but not all, of the final portion of the libretto. The opera was completed by Franco Alfano in 1926.

Metropolitan Opera: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8idNpI9CDo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8idNpI9CDo)

*Turandot* made its Cincinnati Opera debut in 1955 and was last seen in 2015.

**Extra credit: What opera was Puccini’s second opera? (Hint: He continually revised it before eventually giving up and declaring the work irredeemable)**

A: *Edgar*

*Edgar*, Puccini's second opera, was composed on a commission from the publisher Ricordi after the successful reception of his first stage work, *Le Villi*. It premiered on April 29, 1889 at La Scala, but the opera did not become successful.

The plot indicates the influence of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. Both works center on medieval knights struggling between a life of sensual indulgence and ideal love. *Edgar* is "torn between the sacred love of Fidelia and the profane love of Tigrana"; while, Wagner's hero indulges himself with Venus while pining for the love of Elizabeth. The gypsy-like figure of Tigrana also parallels the anti-heroine of Bizet's *Carmen*.

Leontyne Price sings “Addio, mio dolce amor” from a 1978 recording of *Edgar*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hEZgYUE5kY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hEZgYUE5kY)

*Edgar* has not had a Cincinnati Opera debut yet.