

## Turandot - Finding an Ending

At the time of his death, on 29 November 1924, Puccini left the last two scenes of *Turandot* unfinished. His drafts and sketches for these scenes amounted to twenty-three sheets of music paper, most of them written on both sides, totalling thirty-six pages. The drafts extend from the duet between Calaf and Turandot to the moment before the kiss (*il bacio tuo mi da l'eternita'*), and then to *la mia gloria e finita*. Only fragmentary sketches were made for the remainder.

On 25 August 1925, **Franco Alfano** signed a contract with Puccini's publisher, Ricordi to complete *Turandot*. Other composers had been considered for the task, including Franco Vittadini, Vincenzo Tommasini, Riccardo Zandonai, and possibly even Franz Lehár. The Neapolitan Alfano, then fifty years old, was a gifted and successful opera composer in his own right, and, at the end of January 1926, he delivered to Ricordi sixty-one pages of orchestral score.

Working from Puccini's drafts and sketches, Alfano composed two settings. The published version we know today is the much shorter of the two, and it was the one preferred by Toscanini. In fact, Toscanini forced Alfano, much against his will, to reduce the first version, amounting to 377 bars, to 268 bars, and then he cut those even further. Alfano's sardonic response to this was that he would resign his post as the director of the Turin Conservatory and take composition lessons from Toscanini.

Some time before the opening night on 25 April 1926, Toscanini decided to confine the first performance to Puccini's own work, incomplete though it was. And so, after the death of Liù and the ensuing chorus, the conductor laid down his baton, turned slightly to the audience and (according to the orchestra's concertmaster) said: 'Here the opera ends, left incomplete by the death of the Maestro'. There was total silence as Toscanini left the pit, and then someone shouted out '*Viva Puccini!*' and the house erupted in thunderous applause.

References: Franco Sciannameo *Aspects of Alfano*, Musical Times, Winter 2002.  
Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Puccini: A Biography*. Northeastern University Press, 2002.

**Janet Maguire** (b. 1927), an American composer, wrote a Duet and Finale for *Turandot* in 1988, drawing exclusively on Puccini's sketches. This work remains unperformed.

The Italian composer **Luciano Berio** wrote his ending for *Turandot* in 2001 after studying Puccini's sketches. This ending was heard publicly for the first time in Las Palmas on 24th January 2002 in a performance conducted by Riccardo Chailly, who repeated it soon afterwards in Amsterdam with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. It has received numerous performances since then, attracting the endorsement of conductors such as Kent Nagano at Los Angeles and Valery Gergiev at Salzburg, and has been recorded by Chailly and the Orchestra and Chorus of Milan Giuseppe Verdi on DECCA 475 320-2.

Andrew Clements, music critic for *The Guardian*, has observed: 'In making his completion, Berio had several advantages over Alfano, most importantly a sense of historical perspective. It is far easier now to see how *Turandot* stands in relation to the music of its time, and to Puccini's output as a whole, and to be able to inform it with that breadth of stylistic reference. Berio could afford to be far less reverent than Alfano in his completion. As a result he has substantially reduced the libretto,

omitting everything inessential, especially text for which Puccini left no musical ideas. The final moments of the opera are now far less assertive, ending with a series of wonderfully suspended orchestral chords that gradually reach resolution. What the future holds for this couple, the music now says, is hard to define.'

**Hao Weiya**, a young Chinese composer, provided his own ending for *Turandot* for a performance in the National Grand Theatre at Beijing in March 2008. Hao Weiya's eighteen minute version introduces two new non-singing roles: Princess Lou Ling, whose suffering had prompted Turandot's icy opinion of men, and another embodying Turandot's better nature. These roles are performed by dancers.

**Peter Bassett**