

60th Puccini Festival by the Lake

This is a very special year for the Puccini Foundation at Torre del Lago, the 60th year that operas have been staged here, and 90 years since the Maestro's demise. And it is the 110th anniversary of the first performance of *Madama Butterfly*.

This is also a special year for me, the 45th anniversary of when I first came to Torre del Lago on a wobbly old bicycle in 1969. I naively set out on a weekend bike ride from Florence to Torre via Lucca. By the time I reached Lucca I was so exhausted that I collapsed into a youth hostel bed. I could see the spectacular walls of our dear Lucca, but visiting the town had to wait, because the next morning I had to rise at 6 am in order to reach the train station in Viareggio when my friend arrived. She rented a bike, then we continued under the brilliant sun, resting in front of Chalet Emilio next to the lake, then weakly staggering over to the ice cream bar. Beautiful lake! Beautiful memory! Little did I know that 30 years later my young teenaged daughter would perform solo with the Boccherini Orchestra near the lake, or that ten years later she would perform with the orchestra in front of a huge audience.

Now we are in 2014 and again I return, like every year, nostalgic for my youth and Puccini's music. Sometimes I visit Puccini's home and museum, especially if I come with friends who haven't been here before. Most of the time, though, I come for the operas.

This year for the first time in 40 years the Festival is proposing *Il Trittico: Il Tabarro, Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi*. Puccini told the poet D'Annunzio in 1912 that one should always include children, flowers, pains and loves. Certainly the *Triptych* hits all the right notes. *Il Tabarro* takes place on a barge on the Seine in Paris, *Suor Angelica* in a convent. *Gianni Schicchi*, with its unforgettable aria *O mio bambino caro*, is based on a story from Dante's *Inferno*, and also recalls the *commedia dell'arte* tradition. It's quite a rare treat for these three short operas to be performed together, a chance to see the variety of human emotions that Puccini can tap into. They will be performed in the Enrico Caruso Auditorium at Torre del Lago on 3, 7, 21 and 30 August, as part of a program (*Puccini 2.0*) designed to offer opportunities to 27 selected young performers and theatrical specialists. Young singers will be on stage alongside of great artists: Amarilli Nizza in the 3 female roles, Alberto Mastromario in the roles of Michele and Schicchi, with M° Bruno Nicolì conducting.

The Festival's Artistic Director Daniele De Piano commented: *Il Trittico is only the beginning of a broader project... including the Tuscan Region and Lucca Province, to better fulfil our mission as a cultural institution aimed at promoting the image and figure of Giacomo Puccini, who represents for Tuscany, Italy, Europe and the entire world a grand heritage of art and culture. The new multi-year project has a strong emphasis on promoting young people who face difficult and challenging careers as singers or theatrical professionals. We want to offer them concrete opportunities for professional experience. Already in this first year, the results have been very satisfying. We have succeeded in designing a programme that involves many young people working alongside great artists and professionals. Our Accademia di Alto Perfezionamento for lyric singers has allowed us to offer many young people the possibility of debuting at our Festival and participating in many Foundation activities both locally and abroad.*

La Bohème is the tragic tale of Mimi (soprano Daniela Dessi) and her bohemian friends Rodolfo (Fabio Armiliato), Marcello (Alessandro Luongo) and Musetta (Alida Berti). Set in a French



artists' garret, the opera never fails to please. This year directing is the famous cinematographer Ettore Scola, who offers a personal interpretation. Performances are scheduled for 26 July and 2, 10, 15 and 22 August.

Madama Butterfly is my favorite opera, maybe because I took my six-year-old to see it performed in Brussels. Awakened by applause, she stood up on her chair, amazed to watch Butterfly die with her little boy in her arms, then even more amazed as she saw them return to life for a bow when all was over. And my daughter said, *that's what I want to be when I grow up!* What, I wondered? A singer, or part of the romantic world of opera? Raised from the dead by the magic of theatre? Or simply applauded? This year *Butterfly* is a co-production with ABAO OLBE, the Bilbao Opera Friends Association. José Miguel Perez Sierra directs the orchestra and Renzo Giacchieri is in charge of scenery, costumes and direction. Butterfly's role will rotate between the fine sopranos Micaela Carosi, Amarilli Nizza and Silvana Froli; Pinkerton is Rame Lahaj. The dates are 25 July and 1, 8, 16 and 24 August. The opera will be presented again in Bilbao, Spain, next February.

Puccini's unfinished Persian fairy-tale opera *Turandot* returns to the lake on 9, 14, 17, 23 and 29 August, under the direction of Marco Balderi. The ice princess will be interpreted by Giovanna Casolla and Lise Lindstrom (alternating performances), the Calaf by Walter Fraccaro and Lorenzo De Caro, and Liù by Serena Farnocchia. Responsible for staging, scenery and costumes is a young local artist, Angelo Bertini, who comments: *The Turandot that I propose is born from the desire to bring out the avant garde and international vision that Puccini usually interjected into his creative endeavors. The decisive break from realism and movement towards metaphoric rigidity – typical of the fairy tale and of Puppenspiel (puppet theatre) – for me translates into the emphasis on clear and violent duality, as well as on the symbolic. Ritual recalls archetype in this opera. Balderi reinterprets the avant garde sources and concentrates especially on art déco (suggesting the influences of art nouveau, Klimt's byzantinism and Beardsley's drawings) mixed with exoticism. This promises to be a very beautiful production.*

The Festival also offers a special production on 13 August, written by Shigeaki Sbegusa as a *Madama Butterfly* sequel and entitled *Junior Butterfly*. Junior, of course, is Pinkerton and Butterfly's child. Then on 28 August a Korean Opera Gala and traditional Korean ballet are scheduled. The series *MUSIC & MORE* features dancer Roberto Bolle and Friends (29 July), followed on 18 August by popular singer Massimo Ranieri.

– by Norma Jean Bishop
– photo courtesy of Fondazione Festival Pucciniano

Tickets: 0584 359322, ticketoffice@puccinifestival.it
When attending the Puccini Festival or visiting Puccini's home near the lake, buy your *Grapevine* at Caffè del Lago, Piazza Belvedere 275.