

# Seattle Opera Season Opens in Blockbuster Style with Turandot | CultureMob

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by Gemma Alexander | 08/08/12 |

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Like many stereotypes, the popular concept of opera as nine hours trapped in an auditorium seat while large women wearing horned helmets sing in German is based on a kernel of truth. But all is not Wagner in the world of opera, and if you are even remotely curious about what else the art form holds, Seattle Opera's current production of *Turandot* is a perfect opportunity to find out.

*Turandot* is the last masterpiece of bel canto superstar Giacomo Puccini. If Wagner is opera's Werner Herzog, Puccini is its Ridley Scott. Like Scott's best films, Puccini's operas can be enjoyed on two levels. You can delve deeply into the significance of each moment, analyze the deeper themes of the story and the symbols in the imagery, or you can sit back and enjoy the action without thinking about any of that. Whichever approach you take, you will enjoy yourself.

Puccini set *Turandot* in a Hollywood fantasy of imperial China, brought to Technicolor life at Seattle Opera in gorgeous sets that evoke the grandeur and elegance of the Forbidden City. The story of an icy-hearted princess whose suitors are challenged with three riddles on penalty of death borrows heavily from a number of classic sources. One can choose to suspend disbelief and enjoy the unlikely development of events (remember where the term "soap opera" comes from). However, Prince Calaf's determination to win the princess at the risk of not only his own life, but the lives of the citizens of Peking may be more palatable as a metaphor for the recklessness of passion. The homicidal Princess Turandot is not the most sympathetic heroine when taken at face value, but some viewers may find a proto-feminist virtue in her determination to remain single and hold on to her power.



Lori Phillips is Turandot at Seattle Opera  
| Photo © Elise Bakketun



Sets evoke the Forbidden City | Photo © Alan Alabastro

It is easy to be swept up in the music of

*Turandot*, especially during the choruses of

the first act, which may well be the most dramatic in all opera. Whether you realize it or not, you have heard the aria "Nessun dorma," popularized by the Three Tenors in the '90s. You will be humming it for days after watching *Turandot*. Princess Turandot only sings for twenty minutes, but her role includes some of the most technical singing outside the German tradition.

I could mention that the three ministers' world-weary kvetching in Act Two injects humor into a story that could easily become too heavy. It is tempting to describe the scene-stealing beauty of Lina Tetriani's soprano, and analyze the contrast between Liù's pure-hearted devotion and Turandot's bloodthirsty purity. But perhaps it is enough to say that if you've never seen a sci-fi film, you need to watch *Bladerunner*, and if you've never been to an opera, you need to see *Turandot*.

*Turandot* runs through Saturday, August 18. Tickets are available online at [seattleopera.org](http://seattleopera.org) or by calling 206.389.7676 or 800.426.1619. Tickets may also be purchased at the Box Office by visiting 1020 John Street (two blocks west of Fairview), Monday to Friday between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Ticket prices start at \$25.