

BLENDING MAGAZINE

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PUGGINI FOREVER!

ART & DESIGN | COMMUNITY & CULTURE | ITALIAN VOICE | FOOD & WINE | FASHION | STUDENT VOICE | ALUMNI

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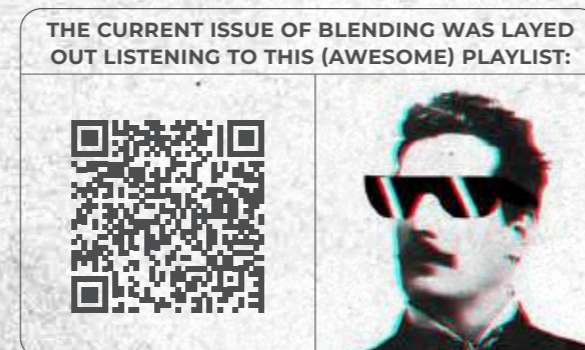
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Letter from the Editors

The most beautiful thing about art is its ability to transcend time and space. Whether composed with ink on a score or resonating through a symphony hall, its purpose remains eternal: to evoke emotion and inspire. The landscape of artistic expression is ever-evolving, shaped by technological advancements, contemporary tastes, and shifting cultural narratives. Yet amidst these changes, certain works - and their creators- remain immortal.

Not many individuals have left a legacy as enduring as Giacomo Puccini, whose genius we honor in this new issue of *Blending Magazine*. This year marks the centenary of Puccini's passing, and with it, we celebrate his timeless contributions to the arts under the theme: **Puccini Forever! The Maestro's Centennial Legacy in the Arts.**

In these pages, students at both Florence University of the Arts and The American University of Florence have captured the essence of Puccini's extraordinary life and work. From the innovative operatic techniques that redefined the genre, to the universal themes of love, loss, and redemption that continue to captivate audiences, this issue delves deep into the enduring magic of his compositions. You'll explore how Puccini's operas have influenced cinema, fashion, and even modern interpretations of storytelling. There's even a nod to his legacy in contemporary food and wine, proving once again that Puccini's artistry extends far beyond the opera stage.

It has been an honor to work with students to curate this tribute to one of Italy's most celebrated composers. Each article and visual element was thoughtfully crafted to reflect Puccini's lasting impact on global culture, as seen through the lens of our students' creative minds.

So, sit back and let the music of Puccini's life and legacy sweep you away. Step into the grandeur of *La Bohème*, the passion of *Tosca*, and the heartbreak of *Madama Butterfly* as we celebrate a true icon of timeless art.

Happy Reading,
The Blending Staff

INTRO

03 Letter From The Editors

06 Conference Recap
by Savvy Sleevar, Paula Simon Borja,
Jack Wardynski

10 "Expressions of Beauty"
Auf and Fua Final Student Exhibit
by Em McCollum & Quinn Hardison

18 Music Psychology of Giacomo Puccini
by Luca Cambra and Trevor Freelove / photo by Ryan Seka

20 The Many Loves of Giacomo Puccini
by Megan Heed, Kelsey Keith, Grace Bradley, and Virginia Kennedy

22 The Beauty of Brokenness: The Heart of Human Emotion in Art
by Gianna Messia & Weston Penny / art by Valerio Calonego

ART & DESIGN

26 Japonisme and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*
by Chloe Saito

28 Cross-Cultural Connections:
Puccini's Work and its Reach Around the World
by Lauren Pimentel / photo by Lilly Vergnes

30 The Butterfly Effect
by Grace Bradley / photo by Robert Thompson

31 Voices of Florence
by Paula Simon Borja / photo by Ryan Seka

36 "Say It With A Song:" Modern
Composers Shape Daily Life in Florence
by Savvy Sleevar

38 The Letters of Giacomo Puccini
by Irene Della Lastra

42 Raise Your Glass For Opera
by Taylor Silva, Ava Granzier,
Brooke Blair, Margaret McGinley

44 Savoring *La Bohème*
by Sofi Plotkin

46 Cheers to Connections:
Wine as a Symbol of Connection
by Madalyn Miller

COMMUNITY & CULTURE

ITALIAN VOICE

FOOD & WINE

FASHION

50 From the Stage to the Streets: Colors from the
Costumes of *La Bohème* In Modern Florentine Style
by Annie Yaeger / photo by Lilly Vergnes and Ryan Seka

52 Biki and Giacomo, Sewing a Legacy
using the Threads of her Step Grandfather
by Amélie Rochefort, Alicia Isaure Andrée Fidanza, Jillian Kuehn,
Cathleen Schutz & Helene Belz

54 Prada and Puccini, a Fusion of Performance and Design
by Phoebe Drew Moore, Eryn Enright, and Melissa Perez

58 Behind the Curtain
by Kendall Havert

60 Verismo - The Reality of Life and
Love through the Eyes of Puccini
by Catherine DePalma

62 Puccini's Legacy Abroad
by Brookelyn Jewett & Lillian Brown

STUDENT VOICE

64 Blazing a Path
by Jack Wardynski

ALUMNI

TABLE of CONTENTS

PUCCINI FOREVER!

THE MAESTRO'S CENTENNIAL LEGACY IN THE ARTS



by Savvy Sleevar, Paula Simon Borja, Jack Wardynski

AUF ACADEMIC CONFERENCE SINGS AN ODE TO PUCCINI'S LEGACY

The 13th Annual Academic Conference, presented by AUF and Stony Brook University's Center for Italian Studies, with the support of Florence University of the Arts, examined Italian composer Giacomo Puccini's life - and his perennial impact.

Libretto

Noun: the text of an opera or other long vocal work

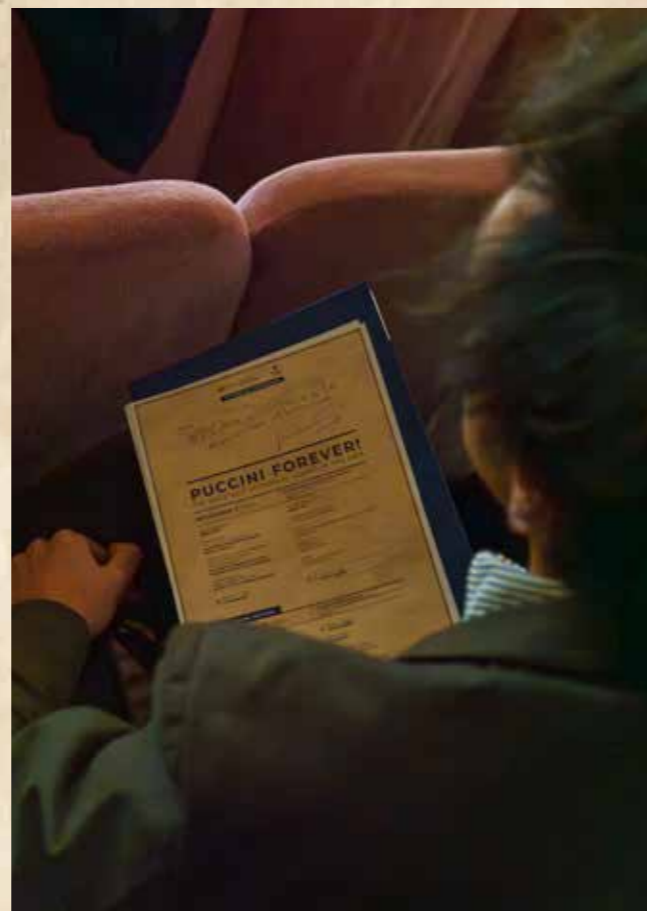
Lifelong musician. Avid automobile enthusiast. Playboy. A composer for the ages. Adored by the public during his lifetime and still celebrated today, opera composer Giacomo Puccini is a totemic figure in Italian cultural history. And a century after his death, Puccini played a starring role at The American University of Florence (AUF). The 13th

Annual Academic Conference, presented by AUF and Stony Brook University's Center for Italian Studies, coordinated by Sofia Galli and Fabio Binarelli, focused on Puccini's enduring legacy. The musical mind behind *Madama Butterfly*, *Turandot*, *La Bohème*, and *La Fanciulla del West*, Puccini was a Tuscan composer whose body of work remains seminal in the opera world.

With an array of panels, keynote speakers, and live performances, this two-act conference welcomed attendees on Friday, December 6 and Saturday, December 7. As panelists showcased their research and creative projects, one thing tied this avant-garde performance together: Puccini's ability to draw people to his music.

So, without further ado, we are proud to present ***Puccini Forever! The Maestro's Centennial Legacy in the Arts.***

Lights up.



Overture

Noun: An orchestral piece at the beginning of an opera, play, etc.

Puccini's operas run the full gamut of genre and culture, from one-act familial comedies to mythic Chinese epics. When adapting his works, calibrating yourself to the right tone proves a challenge, and few understand this better than Federico Grazzini, the first keynote speaker for the conference. Grazzini is an award-winning theater director who has adapted three works by Puccini: *Turandot*, *Gianni Schicchi*, and *Il Tabarro*. "The first music I heard came from Puccini operas, from my grandmother and grandfather," Grazzini said. "Puccini covers a really wide, open range of topics, and it's important to find the balance." The composer's operas are still performed today because of the universal themes they tackle. Their broad appeal gives directors the artistic freedom to give the operas their unique flourishes. "You have to find your way, you have to find a story to tell, and there I think it's helpful to open up, a little bit, your imagination," he said.

Act I

After the opening remarks, the conference commenced with a flourish. The event's star-studded cast featured academics from across the globe, including researcher Luis Neiva from Universidade NOVA in Lisbon. During his panel, *The Psychological Gesture*

of Puccini, he introduced conference attendees to the acting methods developed by Michael Chekhov. Instead of drawing on personal memories to flesh out an onstage persona, Chekhov encouraged actors to give their characters emotional depth through body movement. These methods, Neiva posited, could also help opera singers enhance their performances. While Neiva's proposal could be applied to any opera performance, Puccini's operatic works

are certainly an interesting case study for Chekhov's somatic methods.

"The great thing that (Puccini) brings to the table is that he talks about real people, not so much these heroic, mythical figures," Neiva said. "For Chekhov, the idea of emotion has to be detached from memory. So maybe, it's a way for singers (in Puccini operas) to avoid





a memory in their own past that relates too closely or too traumatically to what they have to do on stage.”

With a background in music, Neiva’s research was born out of his continual interest in the performing arts. “The work I present here is part of my previous life, so to say,” he explained. “I worked so much as a stage singer ... that some sort of passion for opera and passion for acting somehow stayed with me.”

In the first act, another standout performance featured a man, a balcony, and a melody by Puccini. During Italy’s strict COVID-19 lockdown, professional opera singer Maurizio Marchini discovered the unifying power of music. Despite everything, Italians found ways to come together through music. Among them was Marchini, who sang Puccini’s “*Nessun dorma*” from his balcony, offering his neighbors a gift of hope.

A video of the performance, recorded by his wife, went viral, deeply moving viewers. One message that stood out came from a man contemplating suicide after losing his job: “If that is true, I saved a life,” Marchini said.

At the conference, Marchini reflected on the moment, explaining how the experience deepened his view of an opera singer’s role. “Music amplifies the responsibility we have to

our craft,” he said. “We are part of a culture, an art that can save lives, that can bring people together.” For Marchini, this was more than art; it was an act of connection and healing. After a brief interlude, the conference welcomed back the attendees with a new set of panelists.

The first AUF student panels made their debut, Rosaria Parretti’s Music Production



students presenting *Puccini’s Inspiration on New Song Creation*.

Imagine the emotional depth of Puccini’s operas colliding with the bold, experimental spirit of modern music production. That’s exactly what students from the Music Production course brought to the stage, playing unique compositions inspired by Puccini’s famous works. One student noted, “[Puccini’s music] is so emotional and dramatic. It’s given me a deeper appreciation for Italian culture.”

To close out the second round of panels, Andrea Fedi, scholar and director of Stony Brook University’s Center for Italian Studies gave his keynote, *From Opera to Automobiles: Puccini’s Journey into Mechanical Modernity*. Fedi shared how Puccini’s fascination with automobiles symbolized his desire for modernity. “Puccini’s fascination with automobiles was a reflection of the broader cultural transformation taking place in Italy,” he said. Before the keynote, Fedi praised the conference’s theme, adding: “Puccini is often confined to the realm of opera and music history, but we wanted to expand the conversation. We wanted to show that his influence wasn’t just in the opera house but was also tied to larger cultural shifts.”

The next chorus of panelists began with Stony Brook’s Ryan Minor, discussing the different approaches to casting seen in Puccini adaptations. “Historically, no one talked

about (race) and they just cast whoever they had, which tended to be white folks,” Minor explained.

In the century since Puccini’s death, societal standards have changed significantly, and opportunities are open now for more diverse performers in opera. Eventually, productions moved to race blind casting, where all actors were considered for roles, regardless of the

character’s race. “The issue with race blind casting is that no one in the world is blind to race,” Minor said. “There’s race conscious casting ... if the character is Black, we need a Black singer. If the character is Asian, we





need an Asian singer, and that is something you see a lot of nowadays."

Act II

The second half of the conference began the following day with new insights on Puccini. Panelist Lavinia Paolantonio examined early 20th century American critiques of Puccini's operas, which were often accused of excessive sentimentality and theatricality. She highlighted Puccini's mixed reception in America. "He seemed to agree with the criticism," Paolantonio noted. "He wasn't aiming to create an American identity; rather, he was presenting a distinctly Italian opera in a new context."

Up next, students from Nicoletta Salomon's Travel Writing course entered on cue, presenting research for their panel. In this engaging presentation, Jackie Oram pinpointed the cultural biases about women in Puccini's operas. In famous works like *Madama Butterfly*, women - especially women of color - were often confined to tragedy.

"One of his repeated patterns, repeated obsessions, is the tragic suicides of women ... or some other sort of oppression of their character," Oram said. "Art is very much a reflection of society, and a narrowed, distilled

version of it. And I think that gives just such a good impression of what we collectively observe and value about humanity."

However, Oram doesn't see feminist and intersectional critiques as a disavowal of Puccini's operas, noting that you can't "fully appreciate and absorb a work in all its aspects" without some kind of criticism.

Next came a change of scenery as the attendees traveled to Sala del Buonomore at Conservatorio di Firenze, where the voice of Rachael Jane Stellacci soon filled the space. The soprano explored the unique challenges of interpreting Puccini's heroines; characters who are as formidable as they are fragile. In her speech, she discussed the vocal and dramatic complexities of Puccini's roles, focusing on the particularly demanding role of Turandot. "Puccini wrote some of the most fascinating and challenging repertoire for sopranos," Stellacci said. "His women are strong, passionate, and often tragic. These roles demand not only vocal prowess but an emotional depth that requires a deep understanding of both the music and the character ... singing Puccini is like painting. We need to balance strength with fragility, power with softness."

For Stellacci, preparing a Puccini role begins with mastering vocal technique. "You can't



just serve the music ... as a soprano, you're also serving the text. The words, the poetry, they guide us just as much as the music." Talking about her recent debut as Turandot, she noted, "These women may have lived a century ago, but their struggles, their emotions, and their triumphs are just as real for us now. And that, I think, is what keeps Puccini's music alive."

Finale

The conference reached its crescendo with performances of Puccini-inspired pieces by a collective of AUF students: Raquel Fisher, Alexa Rubenstein, Mae Sistrunk, and Naho Umitani. Under the tutelage of opera singer and private voice coach Susanna Piccardi, the students prepared all semester for this moment. Speaking from experience, Piccardi knows how difficult these live performances can be. "When a singer sings, she has to reach the last row of the theater," she revealed. "It's very hard to be quiet and relax." The months of practice and hard work resulted in a moving end to two days of academic celebration. "I'm very happy, I'm very proud of all the singers that performed today," Piccardi said. "It's the first year that the class had the [chance] to perform in front of the audience ... In the Sala del Buonomore, the house of the music, it was a unique occasion." With that, the curtain fell on the academic show. One can assume Puccini would be proud of AUF's latest endeavor: professors, performers, students, organizers, chefs, designers, photographers, all coming together to form their own unique musical ensemble.



“Expressions of Beauty”



by Em McCollum & Quinn Hardison | *photo by Lilly Vergnes*

The Palazzi Community Center proudly presents the fourth and final exhibition of the semester, *Expressions of Beauty*, illustrating their unique interpretations of the city.

The exhibition features work from both long term degree students at The American University of Florence (AUF), as well as study abroad students from Florence University of the Arts (FUA).

Most participants expressed some prior experience with photography before enrolling in their respective class, with the majority either planning to pursue a photography career or still undecided. However, for a few students, Florence has been their first opportunity to explore the medium.

Featuring diverse experience levels - from beginners to advanced photographers, and various photographic styles, including fashion and landscape photography - this exhibition highlights the artistic viewpoints of students,

An anecdote from one student reads, “This semester, I started studying photography by taking my first introductory digital

FINAL STUDENT EXHIBIT

AUF and FUA Student Exhibit



photo by Meran Neese



photo by Brooke Frierson

photography course in Florence, where I learned the basics and developed a passion for capturing the outstanding beauty of the city.”

When asked about the emotions they aimed to evoke through their artwork, most students indicated “calmness,” while others expressed “happiness” or “sadness.” One student, whose piece features “the bright sun beaming through,” shared, “The calm and joy I feel from this photo is something I want to share.”

Studying abroad can elicit a wide range of emotions, often stemming from the novelty of the experience and the overwhelming sensation of being in a different environment. By focusing on calmness, these students are taking a step back from the monotony of their daily lives



photo by Zac Dantono



photo by Hajar El Mahdy



photo by Yulia Berelavichus



photo by Catrina Gatewood

to capture a peaceful moment through their photography.

Studying abroad has undeniably left its mark on these students, shaping both their perspectives and their photography. Florence's allure? For many, it was the promise of travel and fresh experiences, while others felt drawn by the city's rich artistic heritage. Reflecting on the journey, one student described it as "one big adventure," adding, "I feel like this photo also reflects the moment in my life."

Another student noted that their piece "revolves around portraying the vibrant spirit of Florence through its everyday life and distinctive features," aiming to document the "cultural nuances

and small moments that collectively define the city."

While some students provided detailed explanations of the emotions their pieces conveyed, others preferred to leave their work open to the viewer's interpretation.

This exhibition is more than a showcase of student work; it's a celebration of growth and discovery. Through their lenses, these students have not only captured the city's essence but have also documented their personal journeys, bridging cultural integration and community engagement with experiential learning. Visitors are invited to experience these moments of beauty and reflection firsthand, or through Corridoio Fiorentino's digital catalogue, leaving with their own interpretations and inspirations.

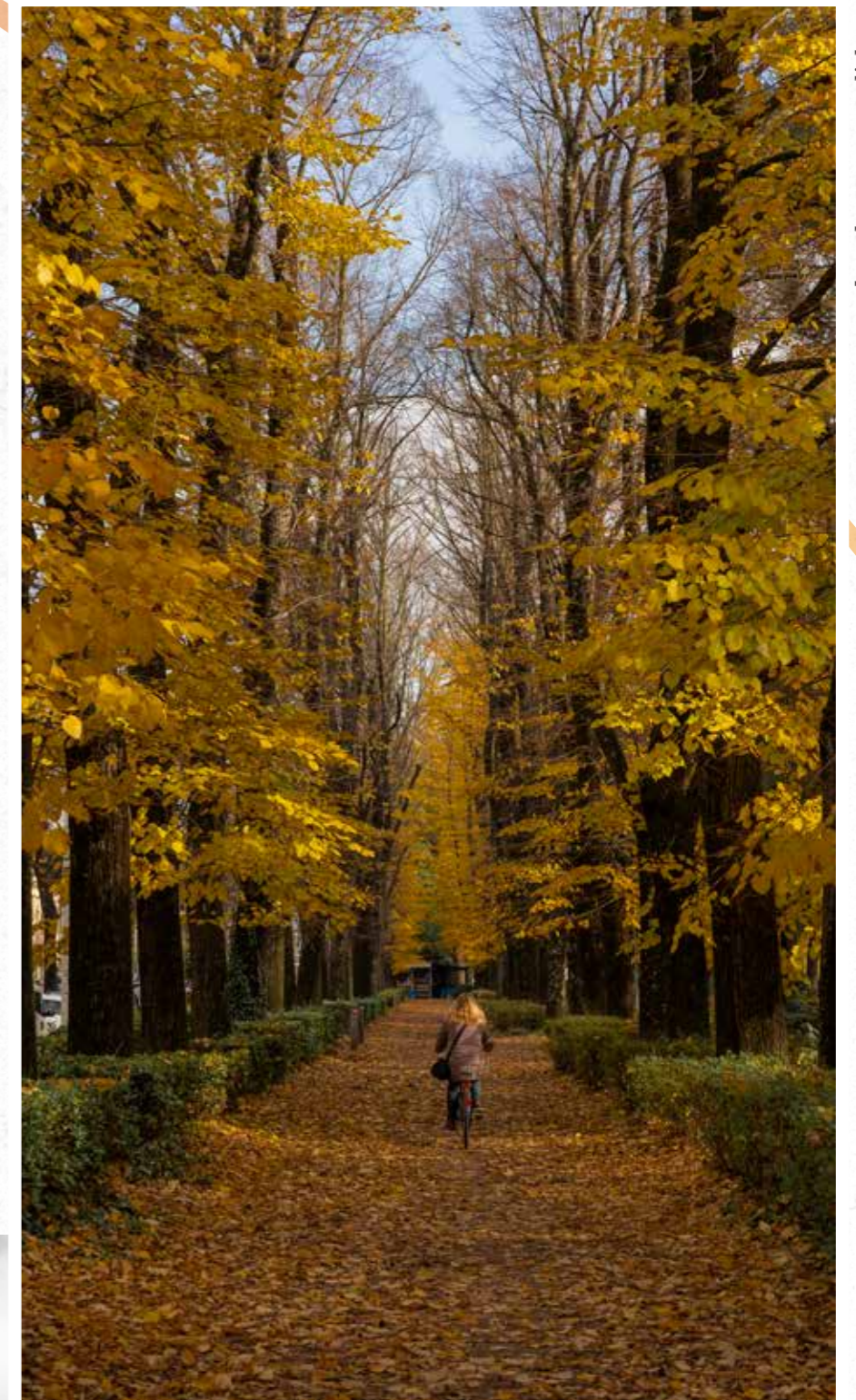


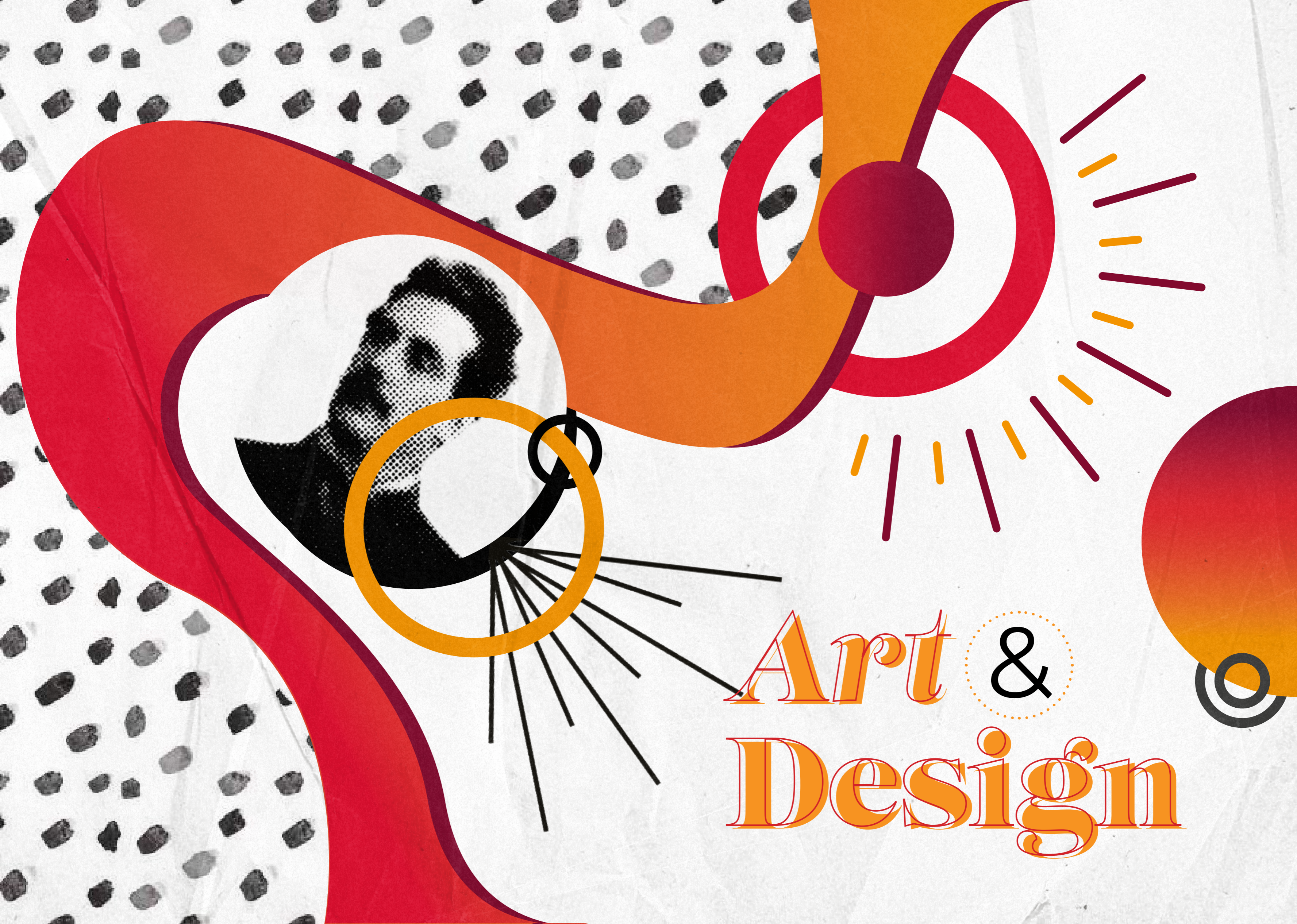
photo by Harvey Salisbury



photo by Kaitlyn Callaway



photo by Meran Neese



*Art &
Design*

Music Psychology of Giacomo Puccini

by Luca Cambra & Trevor Freelove / photo by Ryan Seka

Giacomo Puccini is one of the most celebrated Italian opera composers, known for creating works that evoke intense emotional responses in audiences worldwide. Born in 1858, Puccini's music is still widely appreciated for its emotional depth, often moving listeners to tears. The field of music psychology aims to explain how music influences our emotions, and Puccini's compositions offer prime examples of music's ability to affect us on a deeply personal level. Through this article, an exploration of the psychological aspects of Puccini's music will be made, focusing on how his emotions and personality informed his work.

The Connection Between Music, Emotion, and Psychology

Music psychology, a growing field, studies how music impacts our brains and emotions. Puccini's operas, in particular, are known for their ability to evoke powerful emotional responses. For example, *La Bohème* tells a tragic love story that brings out feelings of empathy and sorrow, while the dramatic suspense of *Tosca* can leave audiences feeling anxious. This intense emotional engagement with Puccini's music is, in part, due to how it stimulates areas of the brain associated with emotional processing, such as the amygdala and hippocampus. Additionally, music releases neurotransmitters like dopamine, enhancing feelings of pleasure and reward. Puccini's compositions feature dramatic shifts in melody and tempo, which captivate listeners and draw them into the storyline. These musical cues heighten emotional investment and may evoke reflections on

personal experiences. Music psychologists have found that many people associate certain pieces with significant events or relationships, which helps explain why Puccini's operas often trigger powerful memories and emotions. His works, with their themes of love, loss, and yearning, resonate deeply with listeners, exemplifying the emotional connection between music and memory.

Puccini's Emotional Attachment to his Music

Puccini's music not only moved audiences; it also profoundly affected the composer himself. Known for his perfectionism, he would often revise his compositions, determined to maximize their emotional impact. However, this drive for perfection brought both fulfillment and distress. Like many artists, Puccini experienced anxiety linked to his high standards. Perfectionism, a psychological trait, often causes individuals to tie their self-worth to their achievements, leaving them vulnerable to disappointment. An example of this can be seen in Puccini's reaction to the initial failure of *Madama Butterfly* in 1904. The harsh criticism of the premiere devastated him and took an emotional toll. For perfectionists, failure can be particularly challenging as it impacts their self-esteem. Puccini's drive for success also caused him to work tirelessly, which strained his relationships, including his marriage. This intense focus suggests that he may have been a workaholic, perhaps even addicted to composing. His dedication to his craft sometimes led to tension in his personal life, underscoring the sacrifices he made for his art.



Psychological Themes in *Madama Butterfly*

Madama Butterfly, one of Puccini's most emotionally charged operas, exemplifies his storytelling prowess. The opera follows Cio-Cio-San, a Japanese woman abandoned by her American lover, Pinkerton, leading to her tragic demise. This story addresses deep psychological themes, including love, betrayal, and despair. Cio-Cio-San's journey reflects a type of psychological trauma as she shifts from hopeful love to complete desolation. Psychologically, *Madama Butterfly* explores themes of cultural dislocation and emotional vulnerability. Cio-Cio-San holds on to the hope that Pinkerton will return, despite all evidence to the contrary. This refusal to accept reality resembles cognitive dissonance - a psychological state in which a person holds two conflicting beliefs. One of the opera's most poignant moments is Cio-Cio-San's aria, "Un

bel di vedremo," where she expresses her longing for Pinkerton's return. The audience, however, knows her hope is futile, which heightens the emotional intensity. This aria captures feelings of longing, hope, and heartbreak, resonating with listeners on a deeply personal level.

Giacomo Puccini's operas are more than musical compositions; they are emotional experiences that profoundly impact audiences. By examining his music through the lens of psychology, we can better understand why his work resonates so strongly. His ability to elicit complex emotions stems from the way music interacts with the brain and evokes memories. Puccini's operas, especially *Madama Butterfly*, will continue to be celebrated not only for their beauty but also for their psychological richness, offering audiences a powerful exploration of the human experience.



The Many Loves of Giacomo Puccini

by Kelsey Keith, Megan Heed, Grace Bradley, and Virginia Kennedy
photo courtesy of Creative Commons: CC BY-SA 4.0 and CC0 1.0 Universal

Famed opera composer, Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini (1858-1924), was a man of relentless passion and complexity – much like the characters in his operatic works. His relationships with women were the source of his artistic inspiration, and the roots of his struggles. Puccini's love life was famously filled with affairs and betrayals that mirrored the themes of desire and heartbreak in his various compositions. He once brazenly declared that "without love, I cannot compose," reflecting how integral the feeling was to his creative process. Love for Puccini was an elusive, yet tangible thing. His white whale that he relentlessly pursued, obsessively attempting to capture its essence in every note and scene he produced. The pursuit of love, with its layers of passion and pain, consumed him, fueling his operatic genius.

Central to Puccini's life was Elvira Bonturi, an already-married woman from Lucca. Elvira left

her husband to live with Puccini, and they did not officially marry until twenty years after she had left him due to his sudden passing. He too had been having an affair, which ended with his death when his mistress's husband discovered it. Elvira became a widow, which allowed her and Puccini a far less taboo union. Their marriage, however, was rife with jealousy and conflict. Puccini's conquest of all aspects of love and desire led to multiple prolonged affairs with other women. Despite this, Elvira's presence profoundly influenced Puccini, helping shape the emotional depth and complexity of his characters in his operas. Their turbulent relationship mirrored the passionate but often tragic love stories that defined his compositions. This can be particularly evident in *Turandot*, one of Puccini's last works, which he left unfinished at his death in 1924.

Turandot is notable for its portrayal of powerful women, particularly through the character Princess Turandot, who sets impossible riddles

for her suitors and executes them should they fail. Critics have suggested that Elvira may have inspired the severe characterization of Turandot. The character's harshness and control over men reflects aspects of Puccini's relationship with his wife, and Turandot's resistance to love may be seen as the emotional distance found in Puccini's affairs. In contrast to Turandot, Liu, a girl deeply in love with the opera's protagonist, Calaf, is often linked to Doria Manfredi, a maid in Puccini's household. Liu's tragic fate is particularly poignant given that Manfredi had committed suicide after having been accused by Elvira of having an affair with Puccini. Puccini was deeply impacted by this event and even left Elvira for years afterward. Through this work, Puccini dissects various themes of love, presenting to his audience its ability to empower, soften, and betray.

Before this, Puccini was still explicit about his love affairs, specifically with one, Mara Anna Coriasco, or "Corinna," as she was known to him. Corinna's influence is said to be felt through his famous *Madama Butterfly*. The opera initially failed in the eyes of critics, but it eventually became known as one of his most beloved works. In the opera, *Madama Butterfly*, or Cio-Cio-San, is a young, 15-year-old girl betrothed

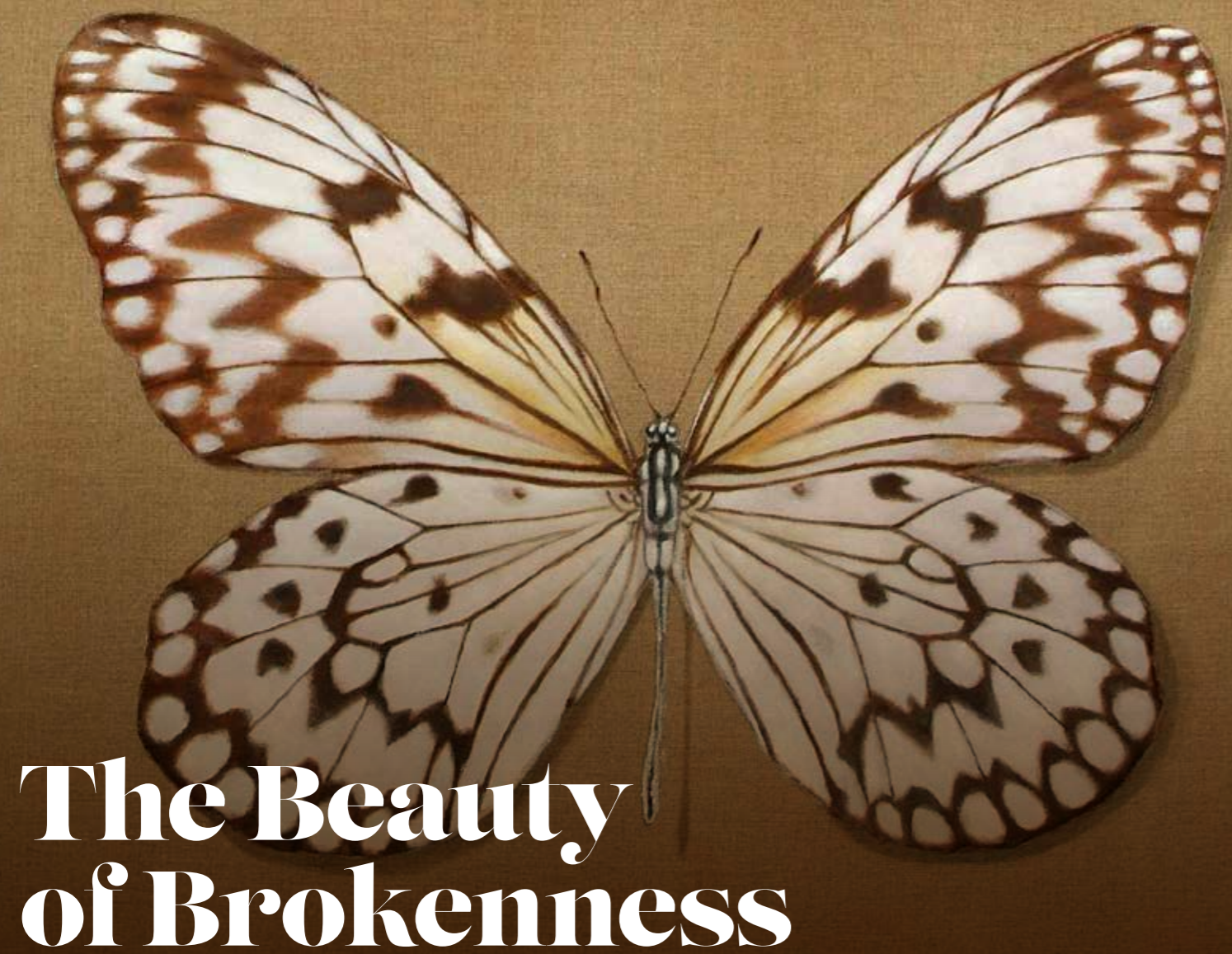
to a US Navy Lieutenant. Deeply devoted to her American lover, Lieutenant Pinkerton, Cio-Cio-San adopts his religion and traditions, which results in her family disowning her. The heroine is ultimately betrayed by her lover and, having no love to return to, meets a tragic end through suicide. Her youth echoes Corrina's,

who was twenty years younger than Puccini. Cio-Cio-San's innocence and devotion in the face of bitter betrayal are poignant reflections of Puccini's romantic endeavors with the young Corrina, whom he inevitably abandoned.

The practice of using one's romantic love interests as an artistic muse predates Puccini, and the desire to capture love in all its forms remains a poignant motif for contemporary artists.

Although this practice saturates media of all forms, the names and stories of these muses - often women - are frequently lost to history. By bringing their stories to light, audiences gain a deeper understanding of the women who inspired Puccini's female characters. Each affair, betrayal, and passionate moment fueled his operas that explored the intense, often painful dimensions of love. Profoundly influenced by the women in his life, Puccini channeled this intensity into art, transforming passion into enduring masterpieces.





The Beauty of Brokenness

The Heart of Human Emotion in Art

by Gianna Messia & Weston Penny | art by Valerio Calonego
photo courtesy of Tauber - "Madame Butterfly"

Connecting Puccini's Emotional Depth to Today's Cultural Narratives

The allure of melancholy is an eternal part of human nature. In a world that often sets its course toward happiness, melancholy digs a contrasting hole to reach deep into introspection, connection, and the raw embrace of life's dark moments. It allows us to process and express emotions that otherwise would remain unexpressed. It interests us, reminding us that sorrow, like happiness, is an experience common to all. Exploring Puccini's dark operas helps us engage with stories that echo our inner conflicts and fragile humanity, seeking not just sadness but meaning and resonance with ourselves and the world around us.

Appeal of Melancholy

In a world filled with love, why are humans drawn to melancholy? How come we want to indulge in the deepest portrayal

of human emotions? We are tied to the deeper psychological aspects of our nature. Melancholy allows us to reflect on life's losses and uncertain times. We are addicted to emotional release, purging built-up sadness. It also connects us to others, as a reminder that we're not alone in our sadness and that the feeling is universal. Happiness can be fleeting and with the passage of time it can easily fade. In many ways, our attraction to melancholy isn't simply about sadness, it is about meaning and an intimate connection with ourselves, and the people around us.

Puccini's Dark Operas

Giacomo Puccini explores dark emotions in his operas, diving into human suffering and betrayal. *Tosca* is one of his most famous operas, with themes of jealousy and tragedy. The intensity of emotions and power in this opera reveal Puccini's love for the human struggle with inner turmoil and sacrifice.

While *Madama Butterfly*, written in 1904 portrays the extreme tragic outcomes of love and betrayal. His ability to delve into strong emotional depths with powerful storylines attracts listeners.

Contemporary Similarities

The dark and passion-filled plots of Puccini's operas find many parallels in today's TV series and podcasts as they delve into the depths of human nature. Operas like *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* are propelled by strong emotions, moral combat, and personal sacrifice, all themes that have inevitably made their way into today's true-crime podcasts, psychological dramas, and documentaries. *Madama Butterfly* is a tragedy about cultural misfitting and unrequited love, Popular true-crime podcasts echo Puccini's storytelling by mulling over the outcomes of fatal choices and moral ambiguity. Yet, the protagonists of these series and podcasts are no different from the poorly flawed, yet relatable characters of Puccini's operas, whose choice reveals their strengths and weaknesses.

The Role of Tragedy in Art

Tragedy has long been a major theme in art; it draws audiences into the raw emotions and existential questions that define human life. This often appeals to the inner struggles that humans face. For instance, classic Greek tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides drew packed audiences into the tales of heroes falling under the sword of fate and human frailty. This universal trope of suffering is an integral part of humanity, transcending time. The enduring appeal of tragedy and melancholy in art, from Puccini's harrowing operas to today's psychological dramas, shows that humans are drawn to art that reflects both the beauty and pain of life. This association with suffering, its healing potential, and resilience across cultures and eras allows for the processing of emotions often beyond words. Just like Puccini's characters wrestle with love, betrayal, and sacrifice, in these eternal stories, we find bits and pieces of ourselves unified in our common humanity and our search for meaning amidst the shadows of life.



Community & Culture



Japonisme and Puccini's Madama Butterfly

Giacomo Puccini's world-renowned opera, Europe's fascination with the East, and the shortcomings of Western perspectives towards foreign cultures

by Chloe Saito | images courtesy of Kitagawa Utamaro, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Madama Butterfly originated as a short story by John Luther Long based on accounts from his sister's visit to Japan with her husband. It was adapted into a play by David Belasco, which Puccini saw and was inspired by. After gaining operatic rights to the story, he began working with his librettists, Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. When the play premiered in Milan in 1904, it was received very poorly by the audience. Puccini and his librettists undertook intensive revisions to the play and when it returned to the stage, it was met with immense success.

In the 19th century, Japan opened its borders to the West, creating widespread fascination with its culture. Imports to countries like France commodified Eastern goods, especially Japanese Ukiyo-e prints. This marked the beginning of the Japonisme art movement which swept across Europe and reached Italy at the end of the 19th century. The creation and popularity of *Madama Butterfly* can ultimately be credited to Japonisme and gives us an insight into how the West viewed Japan during this period. As a result, a question that arises is whether

Madama Butterfly is considered Orientalism. Orientalism refers to the Western depiction and stereotyping of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. *Madama Butterfly* is not a story from the perspective of a native Japanese person but rather the viewpoint of a Western visitor. When examining this story over a hundred years later, it's important to look at both the original story and Puccini's artistic process.

In the process of creating *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini and the librettists took a lot of care to bring a sense of realism to the story. One of the librettists, Illica, visited Nagasaki, which is the play's setting. Puccini acquired sheet music from the wife of a Japanese ambassador in Italy to study and reference. As a result, the music in the opera reflects both Japanese music and Western opera and even makes some direct references to the songs he was exposed to. The original costuming was done by Italian designer Giuseppe Palanti and reflects a Western interpretation of traditional Japanese clothing, such as the use of traditional patterns. Puccini's process is as thorough as possible, considering



what was accessible to the West. Although, the information that was available to them may not be enough to fully understand and portray a new culture.

Many issues around *Madama Butterfly* arise when looking at the characters and story. It is told from a Western perspective and Long himself never visited Japan. This doesn't mean that the story is inaccurate but that it's an incomplete look into a complex society. Intentional or not, stereotypes and preconceptions of the culture can show themselves in Western narratives.

The main character, Cio-Cio-San, reflects stereotypes associated with the Western fantasy of the passive and devoted Asian wife. These Orientalist tropes are widely seen across many works of art and literature including *Madama Butterfly*. It reduces Japanese women down to a singular set of characteristics that are fetishized and exploited at the cost of the culture. An important part of the plot is that she's being led on and manipulated because she is seen more as an exotic accessory rather than his wife. When she commits suicide at the end of the play, she's reduced to a symbol of undying devotion. Cio-Cio-San isn't a shallow character, with her struggles and emotional depth being shown in the opera, but her character is centered around her relationship with Pinkerton. While Puccini put a lot of effort into authentically portraying Japan, it's limited by the shortcomings and limitations of the Western perspective. John Luther Long's original story was built on a shallow outside perspective and doesn't encapsulate the culture's complexity. Thus, the opera is unable to fully represent Japanese culture, despite Puccini's attempts to honor it. *Madama Butterfly* is symbolic of how the West first perceived the East, including the perpetuation

of negative stereotypes such as portraying Japanese women as submissive. Adaptations of foreign cultures into art require a lot of effort to not use harmful preconceptions and instead, understand the host culture. In the case of *Madama Butterfly*, this well-intentioned yet incomplete understanding highlights the limitations of outside perspectives to authentically portray another culture.





Cross-Cultural Connections: Puccini's Work and its Reach Around the World

by Lauren Pimentel
photo by Lilly Vergnes

“You have to cry when he wants you to and laugh when he wants you to. There’s no escape! His works are like a kind of carnivorous plant that slowly envelops you. After a while, you’re at the mercy of Puccini. There’s nothing you can do!” says Michele Dall’Ongaro, a composer and President of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome. Giacomo Puccini, born in 1858 in Lucca, Italy, is widely considered one of the most significant opera composers in history. Puccini’s works span through the late 1800s and into the early 1900s, continuing to have a profound impact on people around the world. On the centenary of his death, the time has never been better to look back and reflect on some of his greatest works and the reasons they seem to resonate so strongly with audiences today.

Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* premiered in 1904 and continues to captivate audiences as one of the most enduring works in the operatic repertoire. While its tragic tale of love, betrayal, and cultural collision is widely known, the opera’s emotional depth and poignant themes remain its defining strengths. At its heart, *Madama Butterfly* explores the devastating consequences of cross-cultural misunderstandings and unbalanced power dynamics, set against the backdrop of early 20th century Japan.

Cio-Cio San, the titular Butterfly, embodies a complex mix of vulnerability and resilience, making her a character of remarkable emotional nuance. Her unwavering hope and tragic fall resonate deeply with audiences, elevating the opera beyond its storyline.

This opera encompasses love, betrayal and cultural differences between Eastern and Western traditions. Puccini explores a cross-cultural narrative and highlights its emotionally charged scenes through his compositions by forcing his audiences to put themselves in these characters’ positions and imagine how they feel throughout each scene. Not only is this opera relevant today due to the vast increase in cross-cultural relationships but also because it highlights cultural differences and perspectives that resonate

with people worldwide. This opera can also be studied through the lens of post-colonial discourse, as it presents themes of cultural imperialism and exploiting those in vulnerable positions within society. This point of view invites modern audiences to reflect on past social issues that still seem prevalent today, triggering important conversations. From major opera house productions to modern retellings, his works continue to inspire artists and audiences alike. Puccini’s final opera, *Turandot*, was left incomplete before he died in 1924. Set in Ancient China, this opera follows Princess Turandot who vowed to never marry. She, however, must marry a suitor but puts measures in place to deter this from happening. The suitors must correctly solve three riddles she proposes to be able to marry her; if they fail to solve them, they will be beheaded. Calaf, a prince in disguise, falls in love with her and accepts her challenge. He solves all the riddles but faces the Princess’s wrath as she does not want to marry him. Calaf, in an attempt to win her heart, presents her with a challenge: to find out his true identity by dawn and he will sacrifice his life. After this point, the opera has no ending written; however, the themes of love, power, and redemption inspire extreme emotional complexity throughout, surpassing the need for language to communicate emotions, and instead relying on the dramatic musical tension. His ability to communicate ideas through more than just words is exactly what continues to make his works relatable to audiences worldwide.

Puccini’s legacy is one of resounding emotional and cross-cultural depth. His ability to capture the human experience through music invites audiences to reflect on their own lives while navigating the complexities of human relationships. As his contributions to the world of opera are remembered, it is essential to recognize that his music continues to inspire, challenge, and connect people around the globe. In this way, Puccini stands not just as a composer of operas, but as a timeless storyteller whose influence will endure for generations to come.

The Butterfly Effect

Japanese Influence and Giacomo Puccini's Madama Butterfly at the 2024 Lucca Comics and Games Festival

by Grace Bradley / photo by Robert Thompson

At the end of every October since 1996, Lucca houses one of the largest European festivals dedicated to comics, games, and anime. This year, the Lucca Comics & Games Festival's theme is "The Butterfly Effect," a theory that claims the smallest actions can progress into large revolutions. In addition to the theme of "The Butterfly Effect," this year the festival honored Giacomo Puccini and the 100th anniversary of

his opera, *Madama Butterfly*. There is an undeniable cross-cultural "butterfly effect" with the 100th anniversary celebration of *Madama Butterfly*. An opera set in Japan, taking place in Puccini's hometown, and with the art direction of Japanese artist, Yoshitaka Amona. Amona has been commissioned to create poster designs based on the three acts of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* for the 2024 Lucca Comics & Games festival. Starting with



Puccini, he was born on December 22, 1858 in Lucca, Italy. Six years later, 1866, marks the beginning of Italy and Japan's formal relations after the end of the Sakoku period.

Italian artists found new inspiration for their work from the Japanese because of the cultural and economic trade connections between the two nations throughout the latter half of the 19th century. Since then, and the eventual end of the Japanese isolation policies during the Sakoku period, the influence of Japanese art techniques and movements has inspired Italian artists and their work across various mediums.

Many art historians are familiar with Japan's opening to the West at the end of the shogunate's Sakoku policies, and its influence on artistic movements such as Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. At the same time as those important art movements, in Italy, there was the Macchiaioli, a group of Tuscan-based painters who aimed to stray from the standards taught by the Italian art academies.

Similar to the Impressionists in France, the Italian "Macchiaioli" incorporated elements from Ukiyo-e, an art genre that encompassed the work of Japanese artists from the 12th to the 19th century.

Ukiyo-e art consists of vibrant colors, fluid brushstrokes, and thin, black brushstrokes. Compositionally, Ukiyo-e experimented with symmetry and spatial planes.

Japanese artists from the Ukiyo-e period were also skilled in woodblock printing. European artists would learn this process and incorporate it into their practice, along with the other

techniques they adopted from Japanese art. Puccini and his work were no exception to his time, which consisted of Japanese inspiration. His 19th century opera *Madama Butterfly*, set in post-isolationist Japan, was only one of the many artistic pieces influenced by the art and culture of Japan. Thematically, *Madama Butterfly* focuses on the interactions between Western officials and their relations with the people of Japan.

Similar to the Japanese artists of the Ukiyo-e period and the European artists of the late 19th into the 20th century, contemporary Japanese artist, Yoshitaka Amona uses the woodblock printing process for much of his work. Amona's work bridges connections between fine art illustration and graphic arts for anime and comics.

One of Amona's most notable accomplishments is his illustration work for the anime adaptation of *Speed Racer*. Anime is another form of media that gets recognition at the Lucca Comics & Games Festival.

The commission of Amona to create poster designs based on the three acts of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* for the 2024 Lucca Comics & Games festival does not exist in a vacuum. The collaboration resides within the relationship of Italian and Japanese creative communities that dates back to Puccini's time and the composition of *Madama Butterfly*.

The current artistic collaboration between Yoshitaka Amona and the Lucca Comics & Games Festival could contribute to a butterfly effect chain reaction, but who knows? Only time and reflection will tell.

The influence of Japanese art techniques and movements has inspired Italian artists and their work across various mediums.

Italian Voice



Voices of Florence

How street music and opera make up the magic

by Paula Simon Borja / *photo by Ryan Seka*

Florence has long been considered the birthplace of the artistic movement. A place to experiment with self-expression, and a place for creativity to flourish. It's known as the city where the infamous Medici family, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci inspired generations of artists, poets, and musicians. However, it can be argued that it is in the sound of the city, that is, the music that fills the air, that truly brings it to life!

While opera is often associated with grand, formal performances, in Florence, it feels as if the entire city is an open-air stage. On any given day of the week, you are likely to hear the unmistakable voice of an opera singer echoing through the streets. You will find yourself mesmerized by their powerful tones spilling out from behind a street corner or loudly proclaimed in an open piazza. But, there is no organization - it is not a recording space or a carefully curated concert, it is the raw, real, and often spontaneous performance of the city itself. Here, opera is not just an art form confined to the theaters. The songs seem to have a life of their own. Street music in Florence is a tradition as old as the city itself. When you consider the opera houses of other infamous cities like Venice and Milan, or the public square performances that go back to the Renaissance, music has always been a public affair in Italy. Yet, here in Florence, there is something uniquely magical about the way music fills the streets. On just about any street you find yourself wandering down, music is almost guaranteed to occupy the space. Take a walk down Via Calzaiuoli, Florence's busiest main street, and you are bound to hear performances from a wide range of musicians. And though all performances are unique, it is usually the operatic voices that steal the show. There is something about the acoustics of the city that allows for operatic performances here to feel "larger than life." The way the music

bounces off the stone walls, wrapping itself around the people passing by, creates a sort of intimacy, as if the singer is performing just for you, and invites you into a world apart from your own.

Florence's musical culture is deeply connected to the city's history as a center for opera. The very word "opera" originates from the Latin word *opera*, meaning "work," and it was in Florence that the first operas were born in the late 16th century. Street musicians are an integral part of this cultural scene, a modernization of a timeless tradition. They bring a sense of accessibility, offering everyone the chance to experience the magic of music in an informal and magical setting. Whether it is a violinist playing a beautiful rendition of a Giacomo Puccini song or a street performer diving us into the newest pop song, each musician provides a window into Florence's soul. It serves as a vital expression of the city's identity. There's also an undeniable sense of connection that comes from hearing live music on the street. These performances have a way of breaking down barriers, inviting people from all walks of life to pause, listen, and share a moment in time together. No matter who is listening, music is accessible to every individual, and brings people together

in a beautifully orchestrated way. In Florence, music is not just something you listen to—it is something you experience, bringing the streets to life. It is part of what makes the city so unforgettable, so unmistakably Florentine. So, the next time you find yourself strolling through the historic city center, admiring

the beauty of the architecture, culture and lifestyle around you, don't forget to take a moment to pause, close your eyes, and let the music surround you. The truth is, it's not just a performance outside, it encapsulates the essence of Florence. The city is singing its story to you.



‘Say It With a Song’: Modern Composers Shape Daily Life in Florence

Filling the streets of Florence with music for decades, songwriter and vocalist Claudio Spadi represents a city steeped in creative tradition

article and photo by Savvy Sleevar

To Italian locals and tourists alike, Florence’s Ponte Vecchio, the kaleidoscopic bridge that stretches across the Arno River, is remarkable renowned. A hardened survivor of the Medieval Era and the catastrophic bombs of World War II, this bridge means business - literally. Lined with goldsmiths for over 400 years, the Ponte Vecchio is bustling with seasoned sellers, eager buyers, and an ever-changing congregation of visitors hoping to take in the view. For first-timers, Florence’s aptly named “Old Bridge” sounds like a charming must-see.

But, for those who’ve lived in Florence long enough to know better, the Ponte Vecchio might as well be the perfect “tourist trap.”

During the busiest parts of the day, Ponte Vecchio is occupied by at least 100 people. For an international student on their way to class, that bridge is the ultimate obstacle course, complete with sidewalk-hogging hordes of sightseers, potential pickpockets, and the constant *kersplat* of those gooey-looking, squishable toys that street vendors chuck onto wooden planks to entice the tourists.

If you’re smart (or if you’ve had an exceptionally bad day and can’t tolerate a slow-moving crowd), you’ll avoid Ponte Vecchio entirely,

opting for the nearby Ponte Santa Trinita or Ponte alle Grazie on your commute across the river. Yet occasionally, those who decide the Old Bridge doesn’t look too bad after nightfall, might be greeted by the thrum of a well-loved guitar as they cross the starlit Arno.

Parked at the bridge’s midpoint three nights a week, armed with a microphone, a smile, and a song, is musician Claudio Spadi: an Italian street artist with decades worth of live performances under his belt. Spadi serenades the Ponte Vecchio at the base of the bridge’s Benvenuto Cellini monument, as his guitar case propped open in front of him, slowly filling with coins and bills from appreciative listeners.

In Florence, nighttime street performances like Spadi’s are a common occurrence. On any given day, you can find numerous opera singers, guitarists, and even accordion players making music on the sidewalk or a crowded piazza. On the city’s oldest bridge, Spadi’s acoustic guitar and warm, mellow vocals create the ultimate evening ambiance. From his opening note until his closing lullaby to the Ponte Vecchio around 10 p.m., his performances compel passersby to stop, and savor the music awhile. While this charismatic Florentine musician lets



his vocals shine on the Ponte Vecchio, Spadi’s offstage passion is composing music. “I am a songwriter; I used to compose with the piano,” Spadi recalls. “But, then I tried to compose on the guitar - and then, I continued.”

As countless musicians would surely attest, whether it’s the late Giacomo Puccini or a contemporary artist like Spadi, composing is a labor of love. For Spadi, he says making music is a deeply personal, lifegiving experience.

“It’s like,” he begins, considering how to best express his relationship with his original music, “To be pregnant.” When you create a new song, he explains, it’s kind of like bringing a musical baby into the world.

Between his instrumental skills, his regular street performances, and his composing, Spadi makes a living solely from his art. As a full-time musician, he composes and records

music in a studio space, releasing songs for the public to enjoy. If you’re just discovering his music, CD copies of *Acoustic Jam in Florence*, a 15-track album Spadi released with musical counterpart Luca Sciortino, line his guitar case at the Ponte Vecchio.

After many years refining his craft on the streets of Florence, Spadi possesses a treasure trove of unique memories and experiences. When people recognize him from a performance he gave on the Ponte Vecchio years prior, he says it’s an incredible sensation.

“When I met these people, I have the feeling like (I am) meeting a familiar: parents, friends - old friends,” Spadi notes. “They have a memory about me, sometimes I also have memories about them, and it’s fantastic because we are connected. We shared something beautiful.”

The Letters of Giacomo Puccini

by Irene Della Lastra | *image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons: La Bohème, Act II, Sextet. Manuscript in Puccini's handwriting*

Giacomo Puccini, celebrated for operatic masterpieces like *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*, is known not only for the emotional depth of his music but also for his intense personal life. His letters provide an intimate glimpse into his inner world, revealing a complex individual marked by vulnerabilities and ambitions. The letters portray Puccini not just as a public genius but as a man facing familiar struggles - fears, aspirations, and the desire to be understood.

A Window Into the Composer's Inner World

Unlike public statements, Puccini's letters were personal, often addressed to family, friends, and romantic partners. These letters allowed him to express his fears about public reception, his worries about being misunderstood, and his doubts about his work. Through these writings, we witness a man in constant struggle with his artistic aspirations. Each opera was more than a composition; it was an opportunity to explore and challenge himself. However, this pursuit often came with inner conflict, as he struggled with dissatisfaction and self-doubt.

Relationships and Creative Influence

Puccini's personal relationships profoundly influenced his work. His love life, marked by intense passion and turmoil, finds expression in his letters and music alike. The powerful emotions in his operas often mirror his own romantic experiences, and his letters capture the highs and lows of his relationships, revealing how deeply these affected his creativity. This connection between personal passion and art

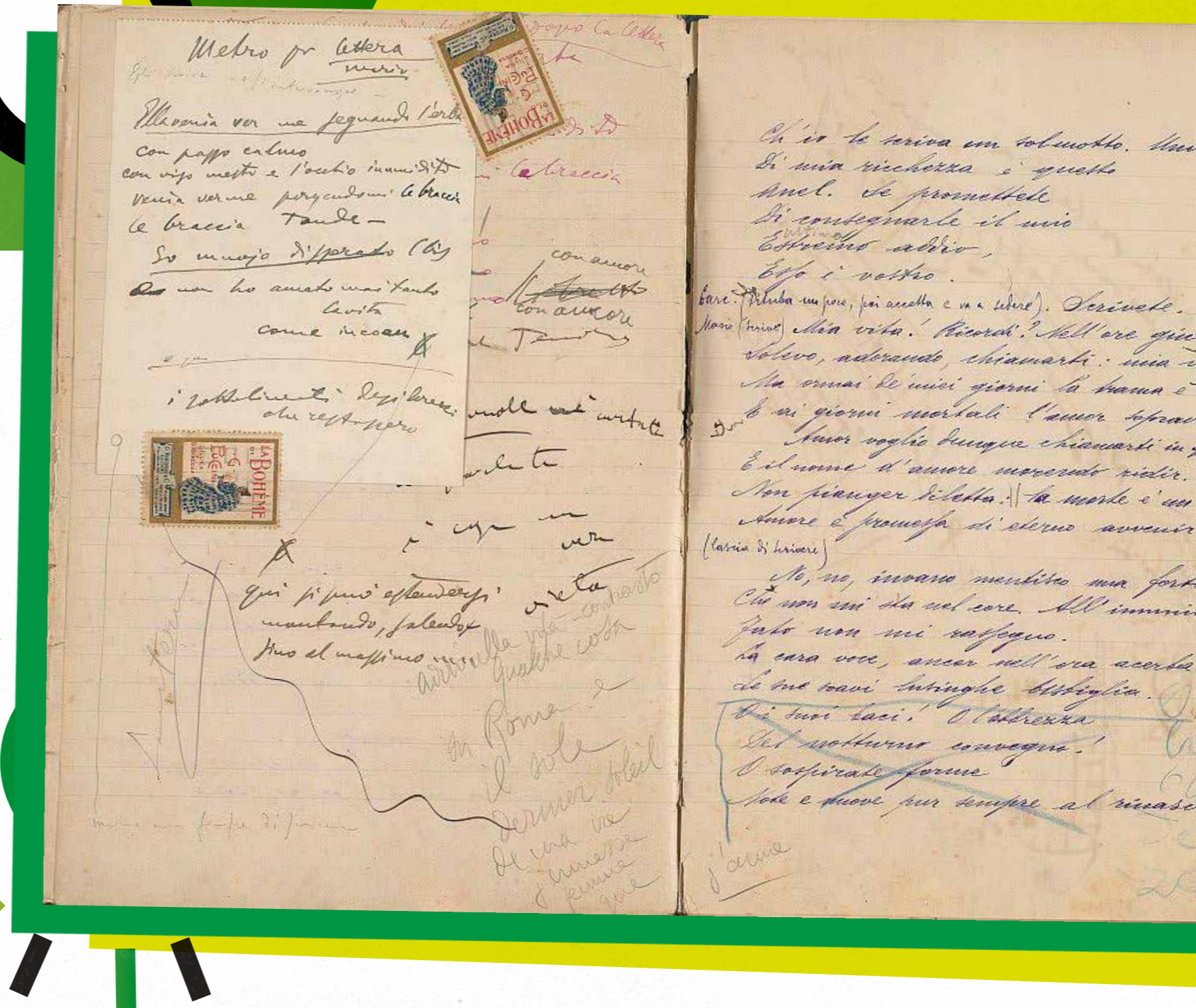
gave his operas an authenticity that resonates with audiences even today.

Friendships were integral to Puccini's life. His letters to close friends and colleagues reveal a deeply compassionate side. These friendships offered him stability during moments of personal and professional crisis, helping him face artistic and emotional challenges. This rarely seen, more vulnerable side of Puccini underscores how much he valued trust and loyalty. His letters reveal a man reliant on these bonds for stability and a sense of purpose.

The Letters as Introspection and Legacy

Beyond simple historical records, Puccini's letters offer profound introspection, giving insight into a man grappling with loneliness, passion, and self-doubt. Through these documents, we gain a sense of the psychological forces that fueled his music. The continuity between his letters and his music suggests that his operas were not only technical accomplishments but expressions of his own life experiences. The emotional intensity of his compositions, captured in lush melodies and haunting themes, reflects his personal struggles and desires, allowing his music to transcend time and speak universally to listeners.

These letters reveal a link between his inner world and his art. Each melody, each note, seems to mirror aspects of his personality, creating masterpieces that reflect his experiences, emotions, and ambitions. This deep connection explains why Puccini's work continues to move audiences so profoundly.



Balancing Integrity and Success

A recurring theme in Puccini's letters is the challenge of balancing artistic integrity with public approval. During a period when opera was evolving, Puccini was keenly aware of new artistic trends and the need to stay relevant. He felt pressure to meet audience expectations while staying true to his vision. This balancing act, though difficult, became a source of both motivation and anxiety. While he desired success, he feared disappointing both his audience and himself. This tension fueled his creativity, driving him to produce music that was authentic and universally appealing.

A Portrait of the Imperfect Genius

Through his letters, we gain a more complete picture of Puccini - not only as a renowned musician and composer but as a complex human being with insecurities, passions, and aspirations. His letters reveal how his life shaped his art, capturing the emotions, fears, and ambitions that fueled his masterpieces.

Ultimately, Puccini's greatness lies not only in his music but in his willingness to reveal himself through words, leaving an emotional legacy that continues to inspire.

Food & Wine



Raise your Glass for Opera

TAKE A LOOK AT WINE CULTURE
IN PUCCINI'S OPERA SETTINGS

by Taylor Silva, Ava Granzier, Brooke Blair, Margaret McGinley

Giacomo Puccini is one of the most influential opera composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Taking a deeper look at his influence in the opera setting, you can see that wine culture stood prominent in cities like Paris, Rome, Florence, and Nagasaki. Many of his operas capture the emotional complexity of love, loss, and passion that resonates with wine culture and the social setting revolving around wine in these cities. Each of these cities has a unique relationship with wine and Puccini's opera. In Paris, and almost anywhere in France, you can find wines like Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Champagne - classic regional wines popular in Paris. Paris has a vibrant cafe culture where many singers and composers have gathered over a glass of wine.

Italy is known for its famous culture of art, opera, and specifically, food and wine. Tuscany, which produces Chianti, Brunello, and Montepulciano, is particularly renowned. Rome and Florence host famous wine festivals showcasing settings for opera, art, and culture.

In Nagasaki, wine culture differs from Italy or France but is heavily influenced by both. Japan imports significant quantities of wine from French and Italian regions. These connections unite these cities through Puccini and his operas, which played a heavy cultural role in the 19th and 20th centuries. His works shaped a lifestyle where people enjoyed life through experiences like seeing Puccini perform in their city while sipping wine from Tuscany, Champagne, or Bordeaux.

In Paris, Puccini's opera had a profound cultural influence, which extended to its wine culture. Many of his operas, like *La Bohème* and *Tosca*, were particularly popular in Paris, portraying Bohemian life and tying into the wine culture of the era. These operas romanticized wine in social and cultural settings. In France, especially Paris, wine symbolized sophistication, artistic expression, and refined taste. Bars, restaurants, and bistros embraced Puccini's operatic themes, creating an ambiance reminiscent of his dramatic works. Customers enjoyed meals paired with wine in settings that reflected the passion and

flair of Puccini's opera characters. Vineyards and wine producers even capitalized on his influence by designing labels that mirrored the intimacy and romance of his operas. Paris became a hub where wine, culture, and the arts intertwined through Puccini.

Puccini's iconic opera *Tosca*, set in Rome, Italy, and performed in the early 20th century, exemplifies his connection to the city's wine culture. Rome, already a hub for wine, saw its flourishing wine industry overlap with Puccini's influence. Romans valued their cultural roots in winemaking while adapting to changes in global and regional relations, the economy, and social norms. During this period, wine symbolized pride, Italian heritage, and cultural connection, reinforcing its significance as a backdrop to Puccini's works.

"Through his music, Puccini wove a narrative where art and wine became symbols of passion, connection, and identity."

Nagasaki, Japan, offers a unique example of Puccini's influence. While sake - a traditional Japanese rice wine brewed through fermentation - was historically more prominent, the Western influence of wine was growing when *Madama Butterfly* debuted. This opera, set in Japan, highlights the cultural clash between East and West. It's likely that American characters like Pinkerton introduced habits such as wine consumption to Japan. *Madama Butterfly* subtly reflects Japan's shift toward Western influences, including its growing acceptance of wine.

Putting it all together, Giacomo Puccini's operas significantly impacted the social and cultural landscapes of Paris, Rome, Florence, and Nagasaki, deeply influencing their wine cultures. Paris' wine and café scenes were romanticized by operas such as *La Bohème* and *Tosca*, set in iconic locations. Puccini celebrated Italian identity through his works, aligning with Rome's deep-rooted commitment to winemaking and cultural pride. Meanwhile, in Nagasaki, *Madama Butterfly* played a distinctive role in promoting cultural shifts toward Western practices, including wine appreciation. Puccini's operas connected human emotions with the enjoyment of wine across cultural boundaries, solidifying his lasting influence on the art and social scenes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Savoring La Bohème

by Sofi Plotkin | photo courtesy of Ninara CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons; drawing courtesy of Public domain (Bohemian Paris of to-day by W. Morrow) and Cafè Momus courtesy of Creative Commons 2.0

Giacomo Puccini was an Italian composer whose work spanned from the late 1800s until the early 1900s. He is widely recognized for his masterful operas, in which he created vivid images of the characters in his works and explored raw human emotions through the development of his music. Puccini focuses on the use of food and wine in one of his most famous operas, *La Bohème*, to symbolize societal norms of the time. Through these artistic elements, he is able to reflect on the community, culture, and lifestyle of the young, poor characters, and their relationship to relevant gastronomy.

Wealth Disparity

Set in 19th century Paris, the story examines the lifestyle of a seamstress and her struggling artist friends. Europe was marked by increasing industrialization, improving the standard of

living for most Parisians. However, there was still an immense economic disparity between classes, where the wealthy were free to enjoy luxuries that remained out of reach to those in lower economic classes, such as the freedom of going out to eat and drink. Puccini's protagonists defy this standard during a specific scene, together at Cafè Momus, a modest and lively venue that serves working-class Parisians.

This act, through Puccini's unique style, reveals to the audience the group's differing identity as resilient and expressive individuals, who value the freedoms and pleasures of life, regardless of their economic hardship. It is clear to the audience that they prioritize community and enjoying life, rather than adhering to societal norms or focusing on their modest financial means.

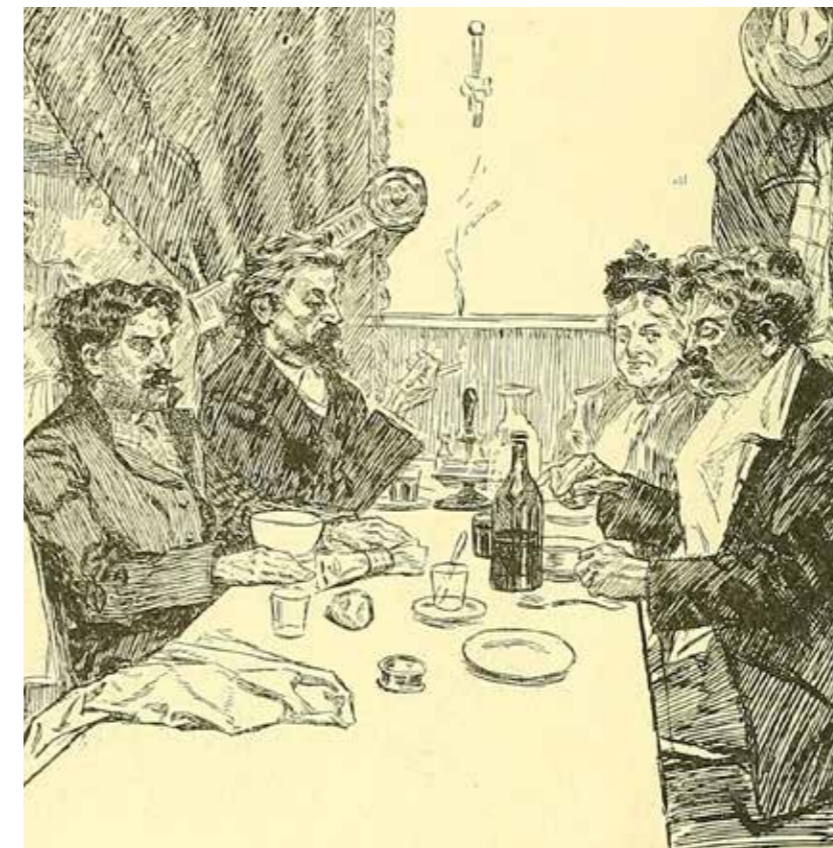
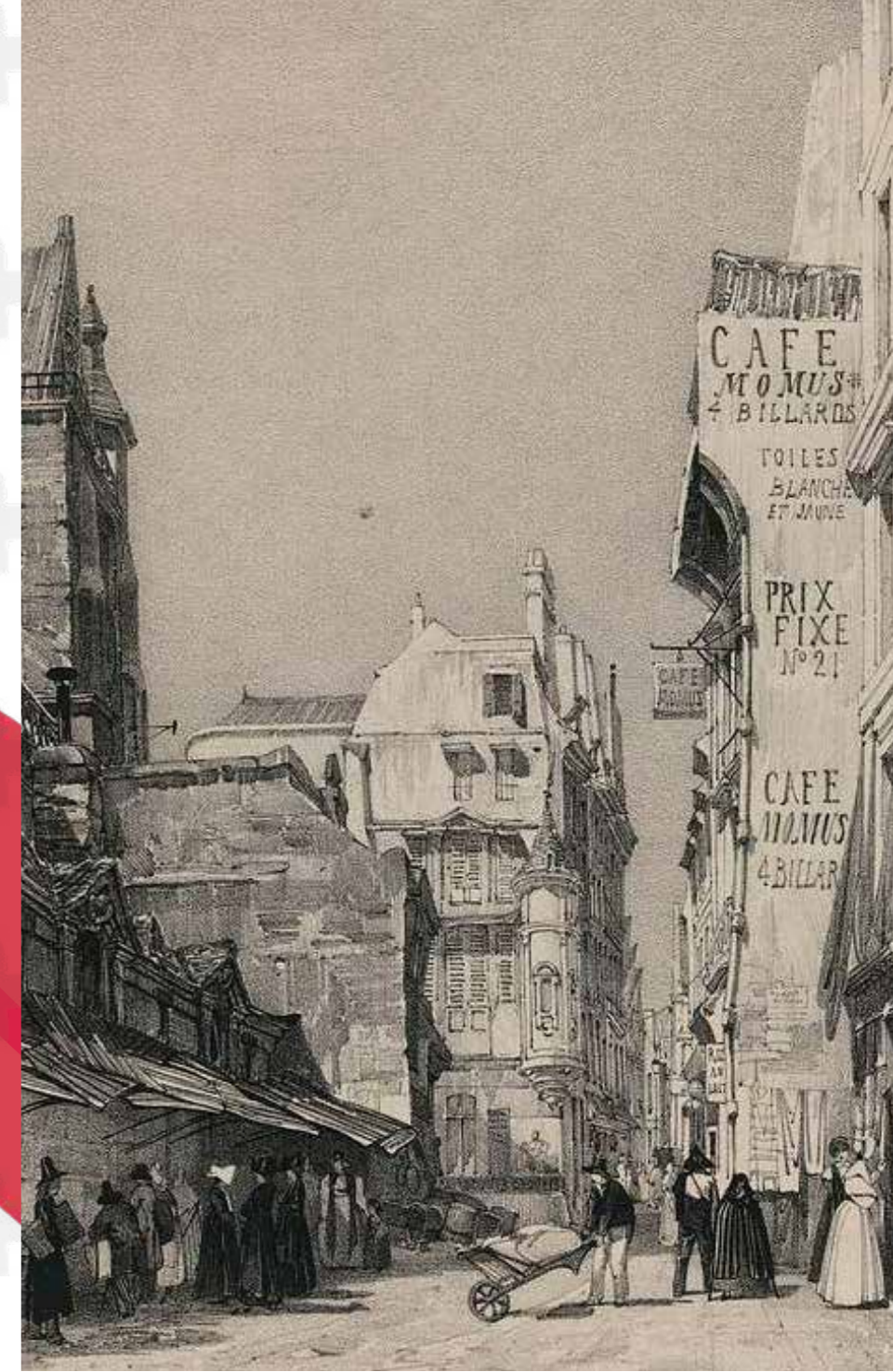


Cafè Momus & Bohemians

Cafè Momus is a bustling social hub filled with street vendors selling anything from sausage appetizers, to plums, to toffee. The Cafè depicts a typical, affordable, gathering space where the middle lower-class would meet. This is in direct opposition to sit-down restaurants which were frequented by the wealthy. A look into this style of gathering offers us a new view of Bohemians, a glance into their truly care-free attitudes. "Bohemians" originates from a group of immigrants who ventured to France, believed to be from Bohemia. They were associated with other members of the lower class, and assumed to be involved in lowly acts like thieving and tricking. Regardless of its origins, the word became used to refer to poor artists primarily residing in the Latin Quarter of Paris. As a result, these artists chose to dedicate their lives to art, as a means of self-expression here in Cafè Momus.

Food

Delving more deeply into the culture of food, we can see how different, inexpensive meals reflect the modest pleasures of 19th century Bohemian life. Sausage appetizers were a common,



affordable street food that was especially popular among working Bohemians. Plums were a fruit found at many Parisian street vendors and markets. They were often chosen by individuals in the lower class because of their accessibility, cost and abundance. Additionally, toffee was a popular treat sold by street vendors, with a relatively inexpensive price tag, given that it was primarily made from caramelized sugar. These foods symbolize the modest culinary pleasures experienced by those of Bohemian life. Puccini's *La Bohème* vividly captures the life of struggling artists in Paris during the 19th century, relating common foods and wine to their lifestyle and values. The modest, yet social meals at Cafè Momus highlight the characters' abilities to remain resilient in the face of economic adversity at the time.



Cheers to Connections:

Wine as a Symbol of Connection

Puccini's Wine Culture Translates to Modern American Conviviality and Human Connection

by Madalyn Miller | photo Creative Commons CC BY 2.0

What better way to start a meal than by 'cheering' with your family, friends, or acquaintances over a glass of wine? For centuries, wine has been more than a beverage, serving as a symbolic expression of religious concepts, wealth, and sustenance. From ancient Egyptian gatherings to Biblical times, the culture around wine has been established as a way to highlight meaningful connections and to establish critical roles within society.

Dating back in history, wine has been used in many different religious contexts among different groups to embody the presence of a divine entity and the complexities of relationships. In Catholicism, wine demonstrates the "Blood of Christ" and plays a sacred role in every Catholic church, along with most Christian churches. This value creates a sense of unity within the Catholic and Christian church community and the progression of faith. Similarly in Judaism, wine brings believers together during times of joy and celebration of religion, such as Passover. Many other religions use wine as a symbol of unity and togetherness to praise a higher power.

Culture also plays an important role in incorporating the drinking of wine as a symbol of togetherness and shared experience. Many Europeans partake in wine culture, much like the ancient Romans and Greeks. Offerings and rituals were commonly found among these cultures to demonstrate gratitude to a Divine Power and foster connections among those involved in that culture. In Ancient Greece, there was even a Greek God of Wine, known as *Dionysus*. Different cultures and religions transform wine into a sacred item to use in ceremonies, rituals, and services that bring the community together to worship.

The concept of wine is even illustrated through the lens of the renowned opera composer, Giacomo Puccini, who employed wine as a multifaceted symbol, fixated on how wine is a concept of conviviality, and represents both positive and negative human connections. By weaving wine into pivotal, dramatic, and important scenes, Puccini emphasized wine's role as a symbol of camaraderie and connection. Puccini also utilized the presence of wine to

intertwine moments of conflict, loss, or despair. In Puccini's operas such as *Tosca* and *Madame Butterfly*, wine emerges as a symbol of connection between characters with both positive and negative connotations. He uses wine as an object of emotional depth and action point to add to the storylines of his work, epitomizing the idea of conviviality between characters.

With *Tosca*, wine is portrayed as a double-edged sword of love and lust. While there are moments of conviviality, the tone shifts when Scarpia uses wine as a deceptive tool to assert power over *Tosca*. This adds drama and theatrics to the opera, while keeping this symbolism of pleasurable wine on the table, but with a theme of impending doom behind it.

In *Madame Butterfly*, Japanese sake, which is a stronger equivalent to wine, is used as a toast to marriage. Toasting with sake once again alludes to this connection between wine and human connection, as marriage is typically a joyous event between two individuals.

At today's American dinner table, wine culture fosters the symbolic meanings of wine seen in Puccini's operas. Wine is integrated in American dinner table culture through celebration, emotional connection, and storytelling. All of which can be derived from Puccini's work. The presentation of wine is often in the form of a toast, in which the American toast is the expression of conviviality and gratitude for the celebrated triumph amongst the group of those participating in and celebrating in events such as weddings, retirements, anniversaries, and more. Wine can be seen in American emotional connections as well, referring to both platonic and intimate connections.

Celebrations of milestones, anniversaries, and special occasions are all typically enhanced with the addition of wine.

Ultimately, wine reflects its timeless role as a bridge between moments of joy, tradition, and storytelling. From ancient rituals to Puccini's theatrical works and modern celebrations, wine remains a universal symbol of human connection and shared experience. Its presence at the table ties us to a larger history, reminding us of the power of togetherness across cultures, eras, and emotions.

FASHION



From the Stage to the Streets

Colors from the Costumes of
La Bohème In Modern Florentine Style

by Annie Yaeger / photo by Lilly Vergnes and Ryan Seka

The characters of *La Bohème*, particularly the women, didn't stray from color. Their costumes contained multiple shades of blue, pops of red, greens and pinks. These colors adorned long petticoats, voluminous puff sleeves, and ankle-length overcoats - all items common in 1830, but no longer as popular in 2024. However, if one were to walk the streets of Florence today, they'd see many of the same colors reimaged in 21st century style.

La Bohème premiered in Turin in 1896, with the costumes designed by Adolfo Hohenstein, a German artist and costume designer. Although it's difficult to track down images of those early shows, some of Hohenstein's initial designs are still available today - and they can be seen reflected in the hundreds of productions of *La Bohème* that have come out since that original debut.

The men of *La Bohème* wear trousers, boots, hats, and vests layered under occasionally brightly-colored overcoats. Marcello, the artist, is often dressed in wine tones, either in a scarf or coat, while Rodolfo wears more muted grays with the occasional olive-green piece. Other male characters sport shades of brown and cream.

The two female leads wear long dresses cinched at the waist, reflecting the typical style of women's clothing in the 1830s, the golden age of opera. Musetta, the more outgoing of the two, wears shades of crimson and pops of pink. As a seamstress, Mimi's costumes are somewhat more humble, leaning towards blues and paler tones.

One is unlikely to spot an 1830s-style dress on the streets of Florence, but pops of red, similar to the tones of Musetta's dazzling dresses, are all the rage for young women and older men alike. Bright red sweater vests can be seen styled over red-and-white-striped button-downs, with the collar peeking out beneath blazers and heavy coats. Red Pinterest-esque ballet flats hide beneath baggy jeans, and wine colored shoulder bags add color to all-black outfits.

Pinks, reminiscent of Musetta, are key to some everyday outfits. Pink textured jackets are both functional and stylish, and simple salmon shirts provide a base for patterned layers. While warm tones play an important role

in Florentine style, cool colors often come into play, particularly those similar to Mimi's many-toned dresses. Blue, particularly in navy tones, is a common staple. The color can be understated, such as in an unassuming blue sweater, zip-up, or pair of jeans, but it can be dressed up in an ensemble such as an all-blue textured suit. And finally, essential to the closet of all Florentines, are neutrals. While the women of *La Bohème* opted for more colorful outfits, the men largely wore shades of gray, beige, and brown. Neutral pieces can pull a colorful outfit together and provide a base for pops of color. As Florence is known for its leather - in jackets, purses, briefcases, and occasionally shoes - is an understated classic. Long, cream-colored coats emerge from closets as the weather cools down. Puccini's costumes were not only influenced by the fashion he saw around him, but they helped inform the color palette at the heart of Italian fashion. *La Bohème* is a highly beloved opera, and productions have taken place all over the world. As such, the show is a part of Italy's cultural canon - and along with it are the costumes and their colors.

Italy is known as an innovator in the world of fashion, but tradition is at the heart of many Italians' personal styles. This commitment often comes out in the colors people choose to build their outfits with. Styles change, but colors remain a consistent thread. Even though *La Bohème* was written over one hundred years ago, its reflection and impact on fashion can be seen just by walking down the street.





Biki and Giacomo

Sewing a Legacy Using the Threads of Her Step Grandfather

by Amélie Rochefort, Alicia Isaure Andrée Fidanza, Jillian Kuehn, Cathleen Schutz & Helene Belz

How the Musician impacted the Designer's life and success, and how she impacted ours

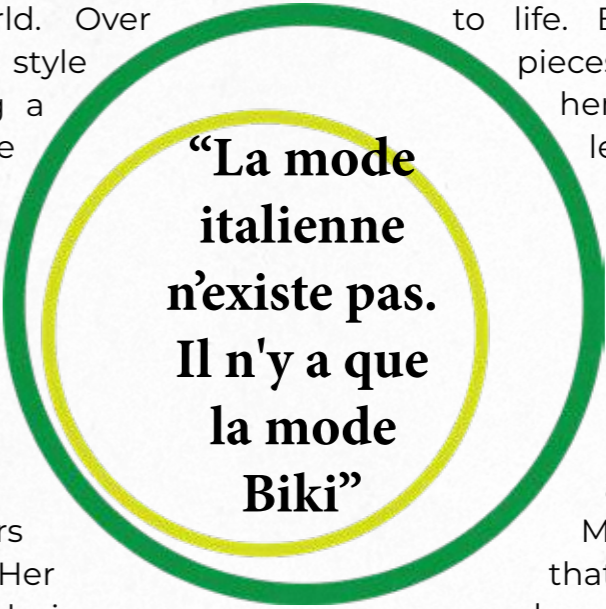
Milano, Italia, 1950 - The famous Elvira Leonardi Bouyere, often referred to as Biki, is crafting something new and unseen with her designs, blending French and Milanese influences to conceptualize a distinct style. Her unique take on French fashion, infused with Italian elegance, presents a thrilling future for Italian style. Her looks are gaining popularity, we ask: is this the Italian Style we've been waiting for?

Italia, 2024 - Born in Milan on June 1, 1906, Elvira Leonardi Bouyere spent her early years studying linguistics and music. When Bouyere was two, her grandmother, Elvira Bonturi, married Giacomo Puccini, the legendary Italian composer and opera maestro. Puccini affectionately nicknamed her "Birichina," meaning "naughty girl," which soon morphed into "Bicchi" and finally "Biki" - her future brand name. With Puccini as her step grandfather, Biki was introduced to Italy's

elite artistic circles, mingling with high society and celebrities in Milan, throughout Italy, and eventually in Paris. Surrounded by luxury and privilege, Biki cultivated a sophisticated personal style and developed an artistic vision that would set her apart. In 1934, she moved to Paris with her husband, Robert Bouyere, where she learned from the top designers of her era. Just a year later, she returned to Milan to open her own shop, bringing with her the skills and inspiration she gathered in Paris to create a style distinctly her own.

Biki's success embodies the spirit of a visionary woman. She established her own brand in a society where men largely dominated the industry, reshaping Italian fashion through her boutique. She believed fashion should be accessible yet maintain quality and elegance. Introducing the Ready-To-Wear concept in Milan, she democratized high fashion, proving that stylish, well-made garments could be affordable. This shift marked a new era in

fashion where accessibility complemented style, ushering in a fresh perspective. Biki played a pivotal role in the Italian fashion industry by blending Italy's heritage with elements of French couture, creating a daring yet sophisticated aesthetic both within and outside the fashion world. Over the decades, her distinct style aged gracefully, remaining a significant influence on the Italian fashion scene as it entered the global stage. Although her boutiques closed after her passing, marking the end of an era of creative originality in fashion, Elvira's legacy lives on, continuing to inspire new generations of designers and fashion enthusiasts. Her impact on contemporary design is visible in modern collections that



echo her innovations, setting a precedent for designers today. Throughout her professional career, Biki was recognized as a pioneer, achieving feats that were groundbreaking for her time. She worked alongside iconic Italian designers Germana Marucelli and Jole Veneziani, often credited as the "mothers" of the Made in Italy label. This accreditation first gained traction in post-World War II fashion shows and has since become synonymous with high-quality Italian craftsmanship in industries from fashion to food and automobiles. Biki's adherence to quality and

her evolution from Parisian inspiration into a uniquely Italian brand helped launch Italy to prominence in the fashion world.

Biki's ambition and vision were evident in her collaboration with Maria Callas, her muse, through whom she brought the Italian look to life. By styling and designing pieces for Callas, Biki echoed her step grandfather Puccini's legacy in a different form, making Callas a fashion icon throughout her opera career. Essentials like a pencil skirt, a jacket cinched slightly at the waist, and Biki's trademark dark lipstick set Callas apart. Biki incorporated Mediterranean elements that gave Callas's look a unique edge: cigarette pants, crisp white shirts, and a tulle scarf tied around her neck. Accessories such as small sunglasses, pearls, opulent jewelry, gloves, and low heels completed the look. Each outfit was simple yet timeless, sober yet elegant, curated to perfection. From the outset, Biki was confident in her style and in what she wanted to achieve. She realized her dreams, establishing herself as a major force in Italian style and design. Biki famously remarked, "La mode italienne n'existe pas. Il n'y a que la mode Biki" - "Italian fashion doesn't exist. There is only Biki's fashion." Today, her statement resonates with a legacy that remains uniquely her own.



Prada and Puccini, a Fusion of Performance and Design

How the Timeless Works of the Maestro have Translated Their Influence into the Contemporary Works of the Iconic Italian Fashion House

by Phoebe Drew Moore, Eryn Enright, Melissa Perez | *image courtesy of CC 0 - Public Domain*

Have you ever wondered where Miuccia Prada gains inspiration for her iconic, eye-catching designs? The head designer of the famous fashion house is particularly fond of the opera, having famously proclaimed Italian composer Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* as her favorite. Her love of Puccini's work has clearly influenced many of Prada's designs. On the 70th anniversary of the Puccini Festival in Torre del Lago, there was a parallel celebration for the centenary of Puccini's death and the 120th anniversary of *Madama Butterfly*. The event celebrates Puccini's legacy and impact, which has reached deeply into various art forms, including fashion. This is reflected in the works of Prada, whose designs often play with contrasts of romanticism versus realism and tradition versus innovation. Her designs tell stories rich with meaning and emotion, much like Puccini used music and narrative to evoke emotional responses from his audience.

Menswear

Puccini's *Tosca*, a political thriller set in Rome in the early 1800s during the Napoleonic wars, creates an intense, dramatic experience over just 24 hours. Miuccia Prada's Fall/Winter 2000 menswear collection draws on this intensity,

with a color palette of deep metallic maroon, dark browns, blues, and muted oranges. These pieces seem to echo the antagonist of *Tosca*, a corrupt chief of police, whose sinister traits translate into the dark motifs used in Prada's collection. For the Spring/Summer 2001 menswear collection, Prada explores romanticism between the characters Mario, a painter, and Floria *Tosca*. Using a softer palette with pastel yellow, light blue, tan, and off-white, the collection incorporates flowing silhouettes, lighter fabrics, and silks to evoke the warmth and comfort of love.

Madama Butterfly, set in the early 20th century, tells the story of a young Japanese woman, Cio Cio San, and an American naval officer, Pinkerton. After marrying her, Pinkerton leaves but returns with his American wife. This opera's themes of love, heartbreak, betrayal, and cultural differences have inspired many artists. Miuccia Prada's Spring/Summer 2024 menswear collection draws from *Madama Butterfly*, featuring brighter colors like vibrant lavender, floral green, bright red, light blue, and soft pink. The collection also incorporates floral patterns inspired by Japanese kimonos, and button-down shirts adorned with 3D fabric flowers reminiscent of origami, creating depth and romanticism throughout the collection.

Womenswear

The Prada Spring/Summer 1997 Ready-To-Wear womenswear collection captures the emotional depth often associated with Puccini's operas. Using dramatic silhouettes and delicate features, this collection displays deep purples, puff sleeves, flowy skirts, and vine-like embroidery over sheer fabric. Miuccia Prada taps into the romantic yet tragic overtones reminiscent of characters like *Madama Butterfly*.

A specific look from the collection shows a structured black suit with a fishtail skirt, adding a dramatic and bold aesthetic. This design speaks to the high-stakes drama of Puccini's operas, particularly *Tosca*, where themes of power and sacrifice are prominent. In the Fall/Winter 2009 collection, Miuccia Prada channels Puccini's flair with luxurious fabrics and dramatic silhouettes. The collection features plunging necklines trimmed with fur, embroidered floral fabrics, and deep red velvet coats, all evoking the passion and elegance central to Puccini's operas.

The Spring/Summer 2016 collection balances structured jackets with rich textures, showcasing a blend of transparent layers and bold embellishments. The use of translucent

fabrics contrasts with sharp, geometric detailing, reminiscent of Puccini's dramatic contrasts. The looks are paired with oversized jewelry, merging traditional and avant-garde elements much like Puccini's style. These designs communicate a sense of performance, with each look telling a story on the runway, much like Puccini's characters conveyed deep emotions on stage.

In the Fall/Winter 2022 collection, sharp, structured lines and exaggerated silhouettes echo the grandeur of the opera. The voluminous coats feature textured embellishments, with a striking use of texture that contrasts sleek, minimalistic tailoring, reflecting Puccini's blend of romanticism and realism.

Puccini's influence on Miuccia Prada is evident in a wide range of her designs, from materials to silhouette. His dramatic operas continue to spread his artistic vision to creative minds across fields. His legacy in fashion is substantial and will likely continue inspiring future designers. Puccini's impact on Prada's legacy endures in the brand's iconic designs and in Miuccia Prada's creative direction, honoring the composer's genius as his work remains celebrated in art and culture.



Student Voice



Behind The Curtain

A Day In The Life with Geraldine Farrar

by Kendall Havert | photo: Farrar - "Suor Angelica" - Creative Commons license

Hello dear readers!

Today, I'd like to take you behind the curtain and share a glimpse into a typical day in my life as an opera singer. From the early morning light to the excitement of performance, each moment is infused with passion and I'm excited to share it with you all!

This morning, I rose and began humming tunes that I will perform later in the day so I can keep my memory fresh and my voice rested. I then prepare for my day, dressing appropriately for the chill of the autumn weather before tending to my geese and making sure they are fed. I savor the sunlight on my patio while sipping on my tea and eating a small breakfast consisting of one hard-boiled egg and a slice of toast with jam. This time is sacred to me because I use these moments to connect with my art and enjoy the beautiful world around me. Today, in particular, I listened to the music of *Suor Angelica* to channel the essence and emotion of my character.

Once I complete my morning routine, I continue my preparation for the performance by meeting with other young opera singers. We have developed a tight-knit community to foster each other's creativity while supporting each other's careers in the arts. These women have become an essential part of my life as an opera singer.

The afternoon is reserved for vocal practice. My coach and I explore new repertoire and rehearse every nuance. Once I feel content with my vocals, I carry out the most significant part of my day. The next two hours are devoted to my journal. I have kept this diary for as long as I remember, and it has helped me develop as an artist and as an individual. Since I love you all dearly, I have decided to expose an excerpt from my diary today as I prepare for my role as Sister Angelica. I write as if I am my character so that I can feel emotions much deeper.

This morning I rose to the soft glow of light shining through the stained glass in our convent. As I listened to the hum of the sisters preparing for the day, I couldn't help but feel overwhelmed by the sense of longing for my son. While I know that I have sinned, I wonder what my life would be like if I were reunited with my son. I am devoted to my convent, but I long for the moment I can be a sister and a mother.

Now, you might be thinking this is a dramatic step in my day, but I have found that I perform with more passion when I can connect with the character I play. Today's journal has made me ponder the contradictory themes of this opera. Sister Angelica is punished for having sex outside of marriage by being sent to a convent, but she is forgiven in the end. However, she is not forgiven until after her suicide which makes it unclear what she is being forgiven for. Is Puccini suggesting a woman having sex outside of marriage is unforgivable, but suicide is not? Is he suggesting all can be forgiven in the eyes of God? This opera has made me question women's role in society, but it has also made me appreciate the progress we have made since Puccini's time. But I digress. As evening approaches, the thrill of performance fills the air. I slip into my gown. The moment I step onto that stage, I feel alive. The audience's energy is electric and I pour my heart into every note.

After the curtain falls, I return home, basking in the afterglow of the performance. I unwind with a glass of wine, reflecting on the night. Each performance teaches me something new, and I can't wait for what tomorrow holds. Thank you for joining me on this journey! I'd love to hear about your experiences with art and music - what inspires you? Until next time, keep dreaming and embracing your passions!

With love,

Geraldine

"Verismo"

The Reality of Life and Love through the Eyes of Puccini

by Catherine DePalma | photo courtesy of Public Domain



We often look to art and music as an escape from reality. Giacomo Puccini is known for inventing the genre of opera known as 'Verismo' - the stark opposite from this proposed escape. In Puccini's works, he highlights the reality of romance and passion, specifically with the intention to portray an unfiltered depiction of relationship dynamics. Instead of shying away from the painful realities of love, he shapes them into something masterful. By portraying love and loss as unavoidably intertwined aspects of life, Puccini communicates the beauty that can still be found amidst imperfection.

One of Puccini's works, *La Bohème*, captures the fleetingness of youthful passion when two lovers, the poet Rodolfo and the seamstress Mimì, fall in love in Paris. Their connection is immediately intense, yet pure. As the love story unfolds, Puccini interlaces the narrative with hints of suffering when Mimì becomes terminally ill. Thus, we watch the couple combat the inevitability of loss as a counterpart

to love. The characters in *La Bohème* are deeply flawed with insecurity and selfishness as a result of their passion. Rodolfo's love for Mimì is profound, yet his devotion is repeatedly hindered by fears about her illness. Through Puccini's portrayal, we watch how the lovers are forced to make difficult choices, which complicate their emotions in the midst of struggle. The lesson to be learned through *La Bohème* is that love forces us to confront the fragility of our passion, along with the turmoils that accompany it. In *Tosca*, Puccini delves into the darkest aspects of human relationships by utilizing love as a source of both power and vulnerability. The opera centers upon Floria Tosca and her lover, Cavaradossi. When Cavaradossi is arrested for helping a political prisoner, Tosca is coerced by a ruthless police chief named Scarpia, who manipulates her love and devotion. In the final act of the opera, Tosca believes she has secured her lover's safety by submitting to the chief's demands, only to realize that his promises were empty. Driven by despair, she kills Scarpia before tragically

taking her own life upon learning that her lover has been executed. Here, Puccini does not offer the comfort of a happily-ever-after but instead presents love as a force capable of leading to both noble sacrifice and profound devastation. Evidently, loss and love are a major theme of Puccini's verismo operas. In *Madama Butterfly*, we see the young geisha Cio-Cio-San devotedly marry Lieutenant Pinkerton, an American naval officer who only views the marriage as a temporary arrangement. Throughout their story, Cio-Cio-San demonstrates a deep capacity for loyalty, while contrastingly, Pinkerton expresses a sense of apathy. It becomes clear that Cio-Cio-San's faith is unyielding, even amidst immense suffering. The tragedy of *Madama Butterfly* is profound because it highlights the vulnerability of love. Instead of providing the viewer with a resolution for Cio-Cio-San's pain, she takes her own life, thus demonstrating that sometimes love's losses are irreversible. *Madama Butterfly* exemplifies how love cannot always shield us from suffering, but it

leaves a lasting beauty that endures. In Puccini's operas, we do not find idealized romances. Instead, the viewer is confronted by the challenging realities of human connection. Through Puccini's works we discover love hindered by jealousy, sacrifice enjoined with betrayal, and passion shadowed by loss. Yet, Puccini does not suggest that these imperfections diminish the value of love. Rather, he shows that these very flaws are what make relationships deeply human. The beauty of *La Bohème* lies not in the perfection of Rodolfo and Mimì's love, but in its fleeting nature. In *Tosca*, the power of love emerges through the willingness to sacrifice everything for it. And in *Madama Butterfly*, love's resilience is demonstrated by the pain of loss, creating an intense beauty that both moves and shatters the viewer. Throughout these works we are reminded that life's trials and tribulations are not obstacles to beauty but essential components of it. The beauty of imperfect love endures because it reflects the reality of the human experience.

Puccini's Legacy Abroad

A Music Student's Journey of Cultural and Musical Discovery

Brookelyn Jewett & Lillian Brown | a photo by Nathan Padgett and, at right, a public domain image from Wikimedia Commons.

Giacomo Puccini, born in Lucca in 1858, was a descendent of four generations of Italian choirmasters. His influence is felt far beyond opera houses in Italy, today impacting contemporary musicians who find inspiration in his work. One individual whom Puccini's legacy has affected is Nathan Padgett, a 19-year-old music composition and Italian student studying at Bard College in New York. Padgett represents a growing number of artists and students, like those studying at Fua and Auf, who understand the importance of cultural immersion in developing their craft. This past summer, Padgett spent a month studying in Taormina, Sicily. He immersed himself in Sicilian culture and language; preparing for his upcoming studies at an Italian university. "It was a sort of preparation for me to spend time studying there next year," he said. His experience went beyond learning the language, he was also able to experience the rich culture and history that informs Italian music and art.

Going abroad allows students like Padgett to gain firsthand insight into the cultural roots of their studies. It fosters a broader understanding of the world and encourages students to see

their discipline through a different lens. For Padgett, his month in Sicily added depth to his understanding of music and its connection to Italian traditions. He was able to experience parts of Italian culture that shape Puccini's operas - elements of storytelling and emotion that are crucial to the success of his works.

As we prepare to celebrate two significant milestones in Puccini's legacy - the one hundred and twentieth anniversary of his masterpiece, *Madama Butterfly*, and the seventieth anniversary of the Puccini Festival in Torre del Lago - Padgett serves as a symbol of how Puccini's work continues to resonate with modern artists.

Padgett has played piano for almost 12 years, and has sung in choir since he was 11 years old. His connection with Puccini goes beyond mere admiration - he has performed Puccini's work, once accompanying a friend who sang an aria from *La Bohème*. Among his favorite operatic composers, Padgett lists Puccini at the top, having listened to *La Bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Tosca*. He finds deep inspiration in Puccini's works. "I want to write like he does," he said. During his own performance

of Puccini's work, Padgett said he focused on the melodies, allowing them to guide his emotional response, which then shaped his playing. For him, the piano should reflect vulnerability, and the music should convey the emotion more than the words themselves.

Padgett also had the opportunity to visit Puccini's home in Lucca, merely an hour from Florence. Although he had engaged with Puccini's music before, standing in the composer's birthplace gave him a new connection to his legacy.

When asked about Puccini's importance to the timeline of opera and music, Padgett said, "I think he contributes really beautiful music that tell beautiful stories." He admires how Puccini embraced Italian traditions while evolving them into something uniquely his own. For Padgett, Puccini's ability to create honest, beautiful music that continues to resonate with listeners today is invaluable. This

understanding was enriched by his experiences abroad, because he was able to appreciate Puccini's work in a setting outside of solely academic study.

Puccini's legacy, rooted in a rich history of Italian opera, continues to thrive and inspire new generations of musicians like Padgett. And in a world with such diverse culture and art, studying abroad can serve as a bridge that connects the past and present, allowing students like Padgett to draw inspiration from history while creating their own masterpieces. His journey illustrates the impact of cultural exchange and immersion, reflecting the essence of Puccini's timeless artistic creations. As we celebrate the milestones of *Madama Butterfly* and the Puccini Festival, it is clear that Puccini's music transcends time - its beauty, emotional honesty, and storytelling power enduring well into the present day. Through the work and passion of those like Padgett, Puccini's melodies will continue to influence generations to come.



Blazing a Path

by Jack Wardynski | photo by Sean Donnelly

It is difficult to imagine two more opposite places than the remote woods of Alaska and the bustling, historical city of Florence, Italy. So when Caleb England traveled more than 5000 miles to start his new life in Italy five years ago, it proved to be a tremendous leap of faith.

"I'm really in love with painting; where is a good place to go? The city of art, Florence," said England. "Of course."

With a degree in cultural studies and a focus in fine art, England turned to a career in teaching after completing multiple tours overseas in the US military. He settled on The American University of Florence (AUF) as the best fit for him to continue his education. He graduated from AUF in 2022 with a Bachelor of Arts, and quickly returned to the school as a professor to instruct students from around the globe.

"I've always been extremely visually oriented, so (art) gave me a way to express things that I felt like I didn't have words for," said England. "It's developed through generations that we know how to read each other's body language, and I think if you get to a high enough level in art that you can use that to express ideas to another person... I think that's awesome."

From an outsider's perspective, Italy would not have seemed like the obvious new home for England. He had never been to the country before, nor anywhere in Europe for that matter, and had no familiarity with the language. Luckily, his years spent in the military prepared him for being dropped into foreign places he was unfamiliar with. He arrived in Florence in January, 2020 with only what he could fit into a backpack and a duffel bag. It took him two years to start feeling comfortable with the language, and another year after that he could speak it conversationally.

In many ways, England's experience immigrating to Italy is similar to those of his students at AUF. While some may have ties to the country, for most it is a complete unknown that they have the privilege of coming to know

for the first time during the program. His firsthand knowledge comes in handy when connecting with students and offering advice on how to maximize their time in Florence.

"I remember being nervous when I got here because it's a new country, it's a new culture, it's a new language... when I really started to put myself into the culture, the language, I noticed how warm and inviting everyone was to me," said England.

The opportunity to teach in possibly the most significant art city in the world is one that England takes full advantage of. He enjoys taking his students outside of the classroom to get hands-on with the sights that Florence has to offer, both classical and contemporary.

As far as lessons go, England looks to draw out the best in his classes by providing them with the artistic freedom necessary to identify their own individual style. Students receive marks for each project they present to him, but they are graded primarily on effort, rather than perceived quality of the artwork. This way, burgeoning artists feel comfortable knowing they have the liberty to not be perfect from the jump, and can take time to find their voice.

"We go through techniques, and I have them practice something new each week... at one point, I say, ok, you've practiced all these, you have to do your final project, now choose the one that you like and feel the most confident in," said England. "If you're coming in here and you're putting in the effort, and you're improving, then you're doing it. Stop comparing yourself to something that you think is better than you in the class, that's not what we're here for."

Diving head first into a new environment and making it a home can be a totally daunting challenge. It takes a lot of courage and belief in oneself to adjust to a new culture and find your own path. Caleb England tackled this challenge head on five years and succeeded, and seeing his students do the same is part of what fulfills him as a teacher.



