

Amazing People Biographical Letter-Writing Contest: to Giacomo Puccini



January 10, 2017

Dear Mr. Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini (or Giacomo Puccini),

Happy New Year to you in heaven! Happy Birthday to you before Christmas last year! Are you still composing with the angels? Too bad that you lived for only 65 years from December 22, 1858 to November 29, 1924 after you were born in Lucca, Italy. If you were still alive, you would turn 160 years old on December 22, this year! Although I have not met you in person, I feel that I have been connected with you all my life. As a fan, I have been to your operas, performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. We simply call it the Met Opera.

The Met Opera, founded 136 years ago, will celebrate its 50th anniversary at its home at Lincoln Center. I wish that you could attend the special celebration with all of your fans due to your amazing compositions. We thank you (grazie in Italian) for your brilliant operas performed around the world! Last year, I sang your well-known aria, *Nessun Dorma* from *Turandot*, at the National Opera and Carnegie Hall. I won the Second Prize as a young classical vocalist!

Exactly a year ago, I officially became a member of the Children's Chorus of the Met Opera. I successfully auditioned when I was seven years old. Guess what? A very special event occurred last week on January 4, 2017. My wish came true when I met the King of Opera, Tenor and Maestro Plácido Domingo, at the Met Opera shop! He was kind and elegant. He performed *Nabucco*, composed by Verdi, and you became such a great composer soon after Verdi! I made and sent Tenor Domingo a special birthday card for him because he will turn 76 years old later this month. Verdi and you have made the operatic world colorful, imaginative and memorable!

As an opera singer, I want to say a few words about three fabulous operas you wrote! The first one was *La Bohème*. My family passed by the Met Opera. At the spur of the moment, we just entered and bought tickets to see it! Originally, *La Bohème* was premiered on February 1, 1896. It had four acts and started with three characters, a poet Marcello, a philosopher Colline, and a musician Schaunard. They were poor with very little food, but they enjoyed what the world of art offered. Rodolfo's neighbor, Mimi, was a fragile and sweet girl. Her candle was out of flame, but she did not have any match to light it back up. Rodolfo helped her and found her cold slim hands. They soon joined his friends, including a bad girl Musetta, at the café in the French market, where children sang, performed by our Children's Chorus. After a feud over the food bill, Mimi got ill with severe coughing. Rodolfo and Mimi had a difficult life together, but they loved each other. Finally, Mimi's illness got worse with freezing hands. Musetta sold her precious expensive earrings to buy cough medicine and a hand muff. On the dying bed, Mimi got weaker, as she her light and spirit were fading away. With Rodolfo by her side and weeping, Mimi left this world behind. In the audience, we were all saddened by this tragedy and touched by the strong friendships. I was weeping for Mimi because she looked helpless but still hopeful!

You wrote *Tosca* a few years later, which was premiered on January 14, 1900. It had three acts. A Roman prisoner Angelotti, hiding in a church, spoke with a painter Mario. They were long-time friends. So Mario fed Angelotti with food. A beautiful but jealous woman, Tosca, appeared. She recognized that a woman in Mario's painting was not her. Therefore, she became so angry that she led the police chief, Scarpia, to Mario's villa, where Angelotti was hiding. Tosca sang downstairs when Mario was interrogated. Suddenly, Napoléon won the war, and Mario shouted and cheered for the victory. The police chief sent Mario to a prison. Tosca wanted to save Mario and agreed to stage a fake execution if she became Scarpia's lover. Nonetheless, she hated this idea and killed Scarpia to avoid humiliation and to save her love for Mario. She mentioned to Mario about the fake execution. Unfortunately, it turned out that the police executed him with real bullets. In deep sorrow, she jumped to her own death. Although this story was gruesome, I admired Tosca's undying love! It was a scary horror story despite the passion!

Finally, my most favorite opera was your *Turandot*, in another stunning story! Again, there were three acts in this opera. The Prince of Persia did not answer three riddles correctly and had to be killed by the Chinese ruler. The Prince of Persia was sent for execution, and everyone ask Princess Turandot for his mercy. Nonetheless, she killed him. The crowd pushed an old man to the ground, and a servant named Liù cried out for help. A young Prince of Tartary recognized the old man as King Timur who was in exile. The Prince of Tartary was so overwhelmed by the beautiful Princess Turandot that he was under her spell with her despite her cruelty. He also tried to solve three riddles to gain her love. He answered *Riddle 1* "What is born each night and dies each dawn?" with "Hope." He answered *Riddle 2*, "What flickers red and warm like a flame, but is not fire?" with "Blood." He answered *Riddle 3*, "What is the ice that makes you burn?" with "It is Turandot! Turandot!" Yes! All solutions were correct! Then the Prince asked Princess Turandot a riddle for her to tell his name accurately. The prince sang overnight "*Nessun Dorma*" for victory. After Turandot tortured the servant Liù for his name, Liù committed suicide. At last, he revealed to Turandot that his name was Calaf. Turandot solved his riddle and told the emperor was Prince Calaf meant: "'It is ... love!'" They united, and the entire town cheered to congratulate them. My question was why, as the composer, you were not sympathetic of Liù, as she loved and was faithful to the prince but died for him? Why did you sacrifice Liù despite her loyalty?

Now, my heart is pounding after knowing these dramatic and stunning stories! Where did you get your inspiration for your wonderful arias? Did you experience this kind of deep love in your 65 years of life? The entire world would not have enjoyed Tenor and Maestro Domingo without your long-lasting love stories expressed in fantastic operas! I could love to meet you in person to give you some high fives! One day, I will perform in all your operas on stage all over the world, just like Tenor Domingo and the three Tenors, Domingo, Pavarotti and Carreras!

With love and affection,

Ferenc