

A critical study of how Puccini creates empathy for his heroines

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Introduction

‘Puccini dealt in theatrical rituals of spectacle and song, whose real purpose was to have a bruising and purging effect on the spectator’ (Kimbell, 1991:633).

In his operas, Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) revels in an ability to portray complex relationships. Within this context his heroines are always central to the drama; their characteristics and motivations each manage somehow to strike a chord with audiences. Puccini, the verismo master, creates this empathy using particular dramatic devices and musical techniques. ‘All [Mimi, Tosca, Butterfly] suffer for love, are made to suffer for it in scenes that range from pathetic to sadistic’ (Martin, 1980:31).

When considering four of Puccini’s most famous and enduring operas: *La Bohème* (Turin, 1896), *Tosca* (Rome, 1900), *Madama Butterfly* (Milan, 1904) and *Turandot* (Milan, 1926), it is striking that within the narrative the female characters are both very different from one another (for example, they are drawn from contrasting cultural backgrounds and are from different classes), but that it is possible also to see patterns which link them all, even though their dramatic contexts contrast so sharply. This study will consider how Puccini uses dramatic and musical devices, to portray innocent women that are changed by the world around them.

This essay will respond to three general questions relating to Puccini’s craft in characterisation. Firstly, how can empathy be accumulated for a character through dramatic circumstance and musical manipulation? Secondly, how much empathy can be achieved through this approach? And thirdly, do the patterns discovered create a generic formula? The decision to focus on the four operas; *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madame Butterfly* and *Turandot* was made as the first three are

generally regarded as 'The Big Three' (Ashbrook, 1969), while *Turandot*, although unfinished, has attained a similar level of public appreciation.

The following discussion of methodology traces the application of research to the above questions. This dissertation assesses the operas from a dramatic view point using the primary sources of analysing their libretti (*The Complete Puccini Libretti: Volumes 1 and 2*) and scores, and by watching video adaptations and live productions. Though in doing this it was possible to get an immediate reaction as an audience member, it is inevitable that the productions adaptation of the operas may have an influence. One possible solution of this was to see as many productions as possible before and during the writing of this essay. As Carner (1974:xi) stated 'one great difficulty [is] to erase from my mind the sediment left from innumerable performances heard, and to undertake my assignment in the spirit of an entirely fresh adventure'.

My research also involved the use of secondary sources, mainly reference books; biographies and analytical approaches to Puccini. Here the most useful books for an initial grounding were *Italian Opera* by Kimbell, *The Operas of Puccini* by Ashbrook and *Puccini: A Critical Biography* by Carner. The musical examples and methods are used to reinforce the drama and explain the audience response. There is rather a lack of recently written reading material perhaps due to an inability to find relevant modern approaches and comments on the subject.

The analysis of the operas is divided into two sections. The research questions are answered firstly through a contextual analysis of the libretti (and therefore the drama) and then by taking an analytical approach to the music by looking at the scores.

Chapter 1: Dramatic devices

It has been suggested that ‘the typical Puccini heroine is in some way tarnished or a social outcast’ (Martin, 1980:32) and, in the broadest of terms, Puccini creates two types of heroine; the first displays external and outward strength but has a more fragile interior. The second appears to be more fragile externally but exhibits extreme inner strength. Within this study the first of these stereotypical groups will be referred to as extrovert, and the second as introvert.

Amongst the externally strong heroines (extroverts) are Tosca and Turandot, whilst the second group (introverts) may be said to include the more fragile Mimi, Liù and Butterfly. These two types can appear as opposites of each other. The extroverts are fiery, melodramatic and, in Turandot’s case, vengeful. The introverts are desperately in love and either are not loved in return or, in Mimi’s case, are pushed away by their suitors. Though Tosca is fiery, she does not have the worldliness or cynicism of characters such as Musetta or Turandot. The character of Liù appears to serve no purpose in the function of the drama, as she does not move the plot forward nor seems to have any reason to appear. ‘Her real purpose is, quite simply, to make us weep’ (Kimbell, 1991:632). However at a crucial moment she breaks through Turandot’s harsh extrovert exterior and allows Turandot to be affected by love. In the four selected Puccini operas there are further women who while not as crucial as the main heroines, play essential parts. At least one of these, Musetta, is developed enough to be defined by one of the two stereotypes. Musetta falls into the outwardly strong definition (extrovert) and serves as a sharp contrast to Mimi. Another of these characters is Suzuki, though stronger than Butterfly, she is still only a servant and therefore cannot entirely show the same extremes as the other extrovert characters.

It is worthy of note that in two of the four selected operas one of each of the two types of women is present. In *La Bohème* and *Turandot* both an extrovert and an introvert woman appear. Although, Musetta is everything Mimì is not and they are vastly different, they are equals and friends. The relationship between Liù and Turandot, however, is quite different. In *Turandot* Puccini uses class as a defining feature, to that end Turandot is a Princess and Liù a slave. The trouble is whereas Musetta is very much a secondary character to Mimì who is the main focus of the audiences attention, the actions that happen to Liù tend to make audience empathy lie with her even though the prima donna is Turandot. As others have noted “[Puccini] seems at least fleetingly to have realised [...] that to make Liù a focus of attention might seriously deflect attention from the central figure and upset the overall design - which of course is exactly what happened” (Ashbrook and Powers, 1991:81).

There are certain traits shared by these extrovert and introvert characters. These may be summarised under the following headings, for the extroverts; innocence, religion, abandonment and mercy, and for the introverts; innocence, poverty, abandonment and mercy.

1.1 Extrovert Characters: Innocence

As different as the two sets of women in these operas are, the stronger women (extroverts) also show something of the naivety and innocence of the seemingly weaker ones (introverts). The trust that follows this innocence is apparent even in the tempestuous women. At the beginning of the opera, Tosca is a melodramatic opera star who thinks the worst that will happen to her is Cavaradossi's unfaithfulness. ‘Tosca goes through life thoughtlessly happy with her love and her success, with rapidly changing emotions and thoughts, from quick jealousy to charming romanticism’ (Carner, 1993:83). Even after everything Scarpia does to Tosca during the opera she remains totally trusting and believes Scarpia will be true to his word. Though Tosca sees Scarpia in

his true light she still trusts that he will keep his word and annul the death sentence on Cavaradossi to get what he wants. It is never suggested that he could be double-crossing her just so that she's placated, Tosca 'believes wholly in her safe conduct' (Carner, 1993:85). When the shot rings out and the audience sees Cavaradossi fall, they suspect that Cavaradossi is dead. Therefore, Tosca's asides praising Cavaradossi for his realistic acting are heart rendering as the audience know he is not acting. Tosca's grief befits her character, and she screams and calls in vain for Cavaradossi to wake up. As the noise of the guards alert her that Scarpia's body has been found, she decides that her only escape is to jump to her death. Her sudden suicide and last words 'Scarpia we meet before God' soften her towards the audience. She is willing to pay for her crime but cannot live without Cavaradossi.

Turandot's naivety is more unusual, she believes that all men are evil due to the rape of her ancestor, but again it is her experiences during the opera that placate her. Her experience of love, not only her personal undergoing of falling in love, but also Liù's display of love and the self sacrifice that comes with it, changes Turandot. Puccini shows 'that under the influence of true love, the hateful, murderous Princess is transformed into a warm, loving woman' (Martin, 1980:40).

1.2 Extrovert Characters: Religion

Unlike Turandot and Musetta, Tosca also has an added layer of trust and belief. She is deeply religious, as you might expect of an Italian in turn of the nineteenth century Rome. It is this layer of faith that makes her three dimensional, otherwise she is just perceived as a melodramatic and jealous diva. However, through the opera the things that happen to Tosca make her question her faith and her world. In the second act she questions God as to why, when she has only ever tried to do good, has she ended up in such a terrible situation. 'A typical attitude from one with a rather innocently lightweight nature' (Carner, 1993:85). However, she is left to solve her problems on her

own and murders Scarpia. It has been suggested that Tosca's ritualistic placing of the crucifix on Scarpia 'suggests that He, who did not answer her in her desperate need, is ultimately responsible for the death' (Lang, 1987:69).

1.3 Extrovert Characters: Abandonment

Furthermore, Puccini uses isolation to create empathy for his extroverted heroines, abandonment affects both Tosca and Turandot. Turandot is completely isolated and is referred to as icy and aloof in the text. This is because she is a princess and intent on beheading any man that tries to woo her. It is very hard for the audience to feel empathy for Turandot, because basically, for most of the opera she is such an unlikeable character. As is stated by some 'The only real problem with the libretto of *Turandot* is Turandot herself [...] is too horrible a person for the audience to accept her instant transformation into a heroine' (Arnesen, 2009:281). Contrary to Turandot, Tosca may be tempestuous but she is a far more approachable character. Tosca is also isolated and this is where the audience first sees underneath the jealous Prima Donna. When Cavaradossi is being tortured Tosca has no one to turn to, she does not know what to do to save him. This dilemma allows the audience to feel empathetic because it is, to possibly a lesser extent, an attainable situation.

1.4 Extrovert and Introvert Characters: Mercy

Puccini uses another device to create empathy in making some of his heroines subject to someone else's clemency. This pattern is used with Tosca and Liù, an extrovert and an introvert respectively. Tosca is psychologically tortured by Scarpia. In Act Two, she is made to listen to Cavaradossi's cries of pain and then told they will stop if she reveals his secrets. Tosca, though fiery and externally strong, succumbs to this psychological torture, showing the audience that inside she is insecure and fragile. Conversely, Liù is a quiet character who although seemingly weak, does not let the threat of torture break her and chooses to die rather than betray her love. She thus shows the

audience that she has huge inner strength. This final act of defiance from Liù is used as a tipping point for Turandot's change of heart as Puccini himself wrote about Liù "her death can have a powerful influence on the thawing of the princess" (Adami, 1931:206). Tosca is offered mercy and succumbs while Liù is shown no clemency and remains defiant, this shows that Puccini's women are not what they appear on the outside.

1.5 Introvert Characters: Innocence

The introverted women are all terribly innocent of the world and naive in their trusting of people; they create such empathy that they are almost pitied by the audience. Puccini exhibits these innocent women and expects the audience to be more worldly and cynical, so a sense of dramatic irony slowly slips in. Mimì is possibly the most naive of the three more fragile women because she apparently does not realise that her relentless cough may be tuberculosis, which eventually kills her. 'Mimì [...] is idealised throughout as a romantic heroine' (Budden, 2002:178). The audience's knowledge in *La Bohème* is very simple, they sense Mimì is going to die, this inevitability is what makes Mimì appear so fragile and prompts the audience to feel such empathy towards her. Whereas, conversely, Liù is foolish enough to believe her silence during torture will be treasured by Calaf because she thinks that he will one day realise his love for her. However, the audience realises Liù is only seen by Calaf as a servant. Her final act of suicide to protect Calaf, makes the audience genuinely feel empathy for the waste of her life.

'At first [Butterfly is] child-like in her naivety, [however] she becomes ennobled by suffering and disillusion' (Budden, 2002:270). Butterfly is a young girl of 15 years who marries a foreign stranger, Pinkerton, with whom she has fallen in love, almost at first sight. The audience senses that Pinkerton is unlikely to return for Butterfly. Then when he finally returns and announces he is going to adopt their child, we realise that this will be a tipping point. It is a shock to the audience that

Butterfly feels her only escape is to commit suicide. Her last few lines start with the words ‘With honour dies (he) who cannot keep living with honour’ (Castel, 2002:372). Butterfly is not a passive victim like Mimì, dying from tuberculosis or Tosca who anticipates her fate when she jumps from the battlement, Butterfly could have resumed her profession as a geisha once relieved of her child. However, she chooses rather to end her life for the sake of honour. To that end ‘The libretto of *Madama Butterfly* makes it effect when the audiences’ sympathies are solidly with the heroine’ (Ashbrook, 1969:116).

1.6 Introvert Characters: Poverty

La Bohème and *Madama Butterfly* share a theme of poverty. Puccini had a firsthand knowledge of poverty in the late nineteenth century as his own father had died leaving a pregnant wife with four children (Carner, 1974). The young composer was only able to go to the Milan Conservatoire due to two scholarships, so money was always extremely limited. Butterfly is also in abject poverty because her father lost all the family money, so she and her mother had to become geishas. Also, at the beginning of Act Two Suzuki and Butterfly (as social outcasts) are down to their very last coins. When *La Bohème* premiered in 1896 it was generally understood that tuberculosis mostly affected the lower classes because they were overworked, underfed and lived in conditions with little or no sanitation or heating. Though Mimì had a proper trade, as a seamstress, in the late nineteenth century her wage would often not have been enough to keep an individual above the bread line.

‘The image of the pale, thin nineteenth century seamstress bent squinting over her work is well known. A trade that had once been lucrative for some women earlier in the century became increasingly less so as the work of the independent dressmaker was taken over by the mass-produced clothing of the ready-to-wear market’ (Whitlock, 2005:117).

So when Mimì faints almost immediately and coughs from the start, the contemporary audience would have understood the broader significance. In Act Four the artists start pawning and selling their possessions to buy a muffler and medicine for Mimì in the last scene when she is dying, and

all she wants is nothing but to be warm. The audience's heartstrings are pulled as she just slips away.

1.7 Introvert Characters: Abandonment

Another major pattern that joins the principle female characters in the four operas is abandonment. During their respective isolations the women each start to lose the innocence they had displayed at the beginning of the opera. The world and the situations they find themselves in, all start to have an effect. It is this developing of their character that makes them increasingly credible to the audience and in turn allows the listener to be empathetic. Admittedly, although Mimì inflicts isolation on herself, she still gets cut off from those she loves. She also removes herself to appease Rodolfo, showing how self sacrificing she is. Butterfly is also isolated; she changed her life to be with Pinkerton who has left her with nothing but false promises. However, 'Butterfly, with that naive and touching faith which Puccini translates so surely into music, believes that her husband will return' (Hughes, 1972:124). Liù isolates herself to protect Calaf's father, she allows herself to be subjected to torture by saying she is the only one who knows Calaf's name.

Summary

Puccini uses various dramatic techniques to create empathy for heroines. Even though there are two distinct types of heroines in most of the operas, the techniques used to create empathy are similar. Themes of innocence, abandonment, poverty, trust, religion and mercy take Puccini's heroines to their emotional limits. Whether apparently extrovert or introvert the fragility of the heroines draws in the audience so that their experiences are amplified and resonate from stage to auditorium.

Chapter 2 - Musical Techniques

Unlike his predecessors and contemporaries Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) and Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868), Puccini generally wrote his operas in a through composed manner in order to keep the drama and plot moving at the same pace (Kimbell, 1991; Martin, 1980; Carner, 1985). Vocally, Rossini wrote in accordance with the eighteenth century *bel canto* style and often employed the use of *da capo* arias which completely stop the drama, as the end of an aria incorporates a recapitulation of the original ideas and emotions of the aria. These arias were created to show off the singer rather than necessarily to imbue the character. Though Verdi eschewed the use of *da capo* arias his writing generally kept to a recitative-aria-ensemble format and only in his later operas did the music reflect the drama and emotions. Verdi also generally dealt with libretti in which his characters were afflicted with weighty high-brow issues such as obligations to God or country versus love and accountability of one's actions. Alternatively it has been remarked that 'the plots used by the former [Puccini] seem "feminine," the latter [Verdi] "masculine"' (Arnesen, 2009:283).

Possibly Puccini's most important musical pattern and creating of empathy is his verismo writing. It has even been said that, 'fundamental to Puccini's art is a feeling for the stage picture' (Budden, 2002:478). With Puccini's work 'the setting is an integral part of the drama, built up with the most loving care, and as authentic as painstaking attention to detail could make it' (Kimbell, 1991:627). For example, before completing *Tosca*, Puccini travelled to Rome to hear what the matin bells of the city sounded like and consulted a priest for exact and suitable texts. For *Madama Butterfly* Puccini studied books on Japanese culture and religion, he listened to Japanese music and spoken Japanese, such was his commitment to truth. It was this dedication to authenticity that prompted the following comment, 'what chiefly distinguishes *Madama Butterfly* from *La Bohème* is Puccini's uncanny use of the exotic Japanese colour that tinges much of the score' (Ashbrook, 1969:118). The

verismo that is brought out in Puccini's music encourages the audience to believe in the truth of it. This mixed with Puccini's 'acute sensitivity to the pathos of the human condition [...] surpassed only by [...his] profound pessimism' draws empathy from the audience (Kimbell, 1991:630).

2.2 The Aria

Though Puccini wrote in a through composed manner, typically at least once during an opera the continuous texture stops and an aria with a very simple accompaniment appears. Similar musical



techniques to achieve empathy in these arias are apparent. They are always written for a tenor or soprano and feature high notes that really move an audience. These arias show the human condition so completely that they have very often been transported from the opera to the recital platform. The recurring techniques in these arias can be seen in parts, in each of the operas. For example, Puccini uses bare and simple accompaniments for these arias, the arias are more like songs; they are often used as snap-shots. They are unprepared in the preceding music and therefore come as a surprise to the listener. The arias are also vocally demanding for the singer as they usually require a great sense of line and space. The dynamics of these arias, for the singer at least, usually range from pianissimo to mezzo forte and therefore require great restraint.

Many criticise Tosca's aria 'Vissi d'arte' for its stopping of the opera and drama (Ashbrook, 1968; Lang, 1987). In a way it does, for everything to stop and the prima donna to have a whole aria on her own where she talks to God, in an act where the tension is building. The aria allows the audience a break from the tension and, also an opportunity to fully understand Tosca's reasoning for

what she is about to do. This allows Puccini to gain the maximum amount of sympathy for Tosca
a n d

Andante molto calmo
12 ♩=42

Flute *ppp* *sosteneudo*

Oboe *ppp* *sosteneudo*

Clarinet in B $\flat$ *pp* *come da lontano*

Harp *ppp*

Butterfly *pp* *(fa la scena come se realmente vi assistesse e si avvicina poco a poco allo shoshi del fondo)*
Un - bel di, ve - dre mo ie - var - si un fil di fu - mo dal - le

Violin I *pp* *Solo, senza sord.*

Violin II *ppp* *come un lontano mormorio*

makes her self-defence even more traumatic. Also, the aria's thematic function is to state the philosophical position of the whole opera and allows Puccini to ask the question; why do bad things happen to good people. Musically, a possible suggestion for why this aria stops any dramatic continuation is due to the lack of original content. The only new idea mentioned is a seven-bar introduction (ex.1) whose "progression of faburden-like chords gives it a somewhat ecclesiastical flavour" (Carner, 1993:112). The rest of the aria is mainly made of Tosca's *Entrance* motif and her *Agony* motif. The difficulty of the aria for the singer comes from the legato line and space that is required. The upward leap of a sixth to the top B flat at 'perchè, Signore, ah' is what catches the listener.

Example. 1

[Act II: Tosca: Introduction to Vissi d'arte]

As in *Tosca*, 'Un bel di' from *Madama Butterfly* takes the audience by surprise due to Puccini's lack of preparation. The opening phrase (ex. 2) starts with a solo first violin, a clarinet and a harp sharing the tune and light woodwind chordal accompaniment. The use of woodwind prominently and sometimes as the sole harmonic background gives the music an almost chamber-music quality. Also, 'the doubling of the outer parts combined with the rarefied scoring gives the affect of a melody suspended in mid-air like a distant vision' (Budden, 2002:259). Two of the previous motifs are recalled in this aria, the *promise* and *longing* motifs. This time the motifs appear in a major key and are tinged with hope, the brief codetta is fortissimo and the melody is doubled by the woodwind, trumpets and horns with a tonic pedal. During the codetta the orchestral texture is at its thickest of the whole aria and the key of A major recurs often in the duet always associated with Pinkerton's wooing. The sudden break at the end of the aria and lack of immediate connecting music often causes the audience to break into applause, for the beauty and completeness of this aria, in the middle of this act.

Example. 2

[Act II: Madama Butterfly: Beginning of Un Bel Di]

In *Turandot*, Liù's death aria 'Tu che di gel sei cinta' is one of the few pieces of Puccini's music that contain his own lyrics and 'there occurs in this number a fatal shift of focus away from Turandot' as sympathy is created for Liù (Ashbrook and Powers, 1991:40). As with *Tosca*, the melody is doubled in the woodwind section and the key seems to 'strive towards the dominant key, only to be forced back to an inexorable tonic' (Budden, 2002:464). The soft dissonances pile up to the climax where the crowd shout 'Parla' ('Speak') and Liù stabs herself. While, as with *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*, Mimi's solo aria in *La Bohème* is not prepared and indeed, her aria completely changes the light-hearted comical mood of the act. The rondo beginning 'Mi Chiamano Mimi' keeps wanting to flatten from the aria's main tonality suggesting a lowering of the eyes. Puccini imparts a feeling of urgency to the aria by having a secondary rhythmic impulse in the accompaniment with stress off-beats against the predominant rhythm in the vocal line (ex. 3). This happens during Mimi's description of her pleasure in 'little things' and the melody is doubled in the orchestral bass.



The end of the aria is 'so important [...] melody to her portrayal that its opening strain will furnish her with a subsidiary leitmotif in the acts that follow' (Budden, 2002:165).

Example. 3

[Act III: *La Bohème*: Mi Chiamano Mimi (piano reduction)]

As has been detailed above not only are these arias a pattern themselves they also all have matching patterns within them that create empathy. These stand-alone arias are all vocally demanding due to the control and emotions required in them. Musically they each have a simple accompaniment and the vocal melody is often doubled in the orchestra, especially after the climax. This coupled with the lack of musical or dramatic preparation before the arias really enhances the effect they have on the audience.

2.3 Parallel

Another device uses for empathy in is love



These duets

Love Duets

musical
Puccini
creating
the music
duets.
are usually

extended and parallel to each other. Often they appear in the first and last acts between the lovers. Puccini uses this device in *Tosca* and *La Bohème*, and uses specific motifs to recall the first duets thoughts in the second. Unfortunately, usually by Act Two the recalled motifs are tainted and not full of the verve with which they were expressed in Act One. Possibly following Wagner, Puccini does not write duets in the true sense of the word for the lovers rarely sing together. In realistic opera, layering voices on top of each other goes against the principle of dramatic truth (Carner, 1985). However in *Madama Butterfly*, though there are parallel duets as in *Tosca* and *La Bohème*, the motifs with emotional sentiment are absent in the second duet.

In *Tosca* the love scenes both show the lovers at the height of their emotion for each other, the second duet also references the first, making them parallel. In the Act One duet, which is 258 bars long, the lovers are secure in their life and love. However, in the Act Three duet, which is only 145 bars long, the situation surrounding the lovers affects the duet. There are four main sections in the first scene that are twice interrupted by one of the lovers breaking into a small through composed aria. The first three sections are all in related flat keys following the pattern of tonic, sub-dominant and dominant. It is the fourth section that causes surprise with its sudden shift to E major which neatly underlines the text, Tosca's jealousy. The scene climaxes in this E major, raising the emotional temperature, with a new *love theme* (ex. 4). It is almost as if 'E major seems to have been

a

The image shows a musical score for a scene from *Tosca*. It includes staves for Harp, Mimi (soprano), Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is E major (one sharp) and the time signature is 4/4. Mimi's vocal line has the lyrics: "so - noan - da - ti? fin - ge - vo di dor - mi - re per - chè". The score includes dynamic markings like *mf*, *pp*, and *p*, and performance instructions such as "(Rodolfo nods)", "dim.", and "p".

luminous key associated with the expression of ardour and joyful exaltation' (Carner; 1985:105).

Example. 4

[Act 1: *Tosca*: First duet climax (*love theme*)]

Comparing the Act One and Act Three duets, parallels can be seen as the second duet also has four sections in which the first three are in flat keys followed by a final E major section. However, the

tenor of the duets has changed, in the third act Tosca and Cavaradossi talk about their love for each other as before but they are both worried that the mock-execution may not turn out well. Also, between the first and third acts, Tosca has lost some of the innocence and trust that enabled her to be carefree in Act One. It has been suggested that the disproportionate lengths of the two scenes may be because Puccini wanted to show the depth of Tosca's love for Cavaradossi to make her murder of Scarpia plausible. 'Puccini's thought may have been that only a woman so deeply in love would have the moral strength, first to agree to Scarpia's bargain and then to kill him' (Carner, 1993:105).

In *La Bohème* Puccini uses many musical devices in Act Four to evoke sympathy for Mimi. Even before she enters, the *love-theme* is repeated but harmonised with two minor chords, instead of the major chords used previously, to show the audience that Rodolfo and Marcello are missing their loves (ex. 5).

Example. 5

[Act IV: *La Bohème*: Second duet *love theme*]

The two chords serve not only to change the repetition of the theme but also to prepare the audience for a statement about love that is considerably different and less joyous than previously heard.

Puccini uses one of the simplest musical means of shattering Rodolfo's hope, namely, a continuation in the C minor of a phrase that the listener will have expected to continue

in the major. Thus the very first note and chord of the theme is highly charged, musically and dramatically, despite its being a simple expression of the key of C minor (Groos and Parker, 1986:87).

The love-theme is then repeated again during Mimì and Rodolfo's extended duet and yet again harmonised differently. It appears just after Mimì and Rodolfo declare their joy at being reunited. This time it is used to point out to the listener that this happiness is not going to be long enjoyed. The accompanying chords are no longer tonic to dominant but rather finish on the tonic.

'Sono Andati?' in Act Four is when Mimì seems to the audience to be most fragile. Mimì and Rodolfo talk about their love and remember happier times. In this duet 'Puccini would not have been Puccini had he not immortalised Mimì's last moments with one of the most inspired melodies that ever sprang into his head' (Carner, 1974:289). The opening of 'Sono andanti?' is very sparse, Mimì starts on her own and is then joined by the violins and violas playing static chords. The cellos and harp do not join until the third bar (ex. 6). Mimì's motif is as musically frail as her character and the fact that Puccini decides not to develop her motif until the final scene of the opera allows it to really stand out to the listener. The re-harmonisation of the motif with diminished seventh chords and the introduction of the cor anglais are blatant.

Example. 6 [Act IV: *La Bohème*: Start of Sono andanti]

In *Madama Butterfly* 'Never before had Puccini composed a score that so snugly and evocatively fitted the dramatic action and expressed the moods of his characters' (Ashbrook, 1969:118). This can be seen acutely in the two duets between Butterfly and Pinkerton. The beginning of the scene to the end of Act One is almost 270 bars. The extended duet is developed through a succession of

lyrical ideas underpinned by a formal structure and laced with many motif recollections. The duet is divided into four sections in which the first three are loosely in ternary form and the last climactically recalls the motif of Butterfly's first appearance. Puccini characterises the first two sections; section I with its 'Westernised pentatonic contour of the long third phrase [...] assign it spiritually to Butterfly' (Budden, 2002:256), and the second section belongs to Pinkerton. Butterfly's entrance motif appears many times in the last section and it is first heralded by a solo oboe accompanied by muted strings to show the depth of emotion that Butterfly yearns for from her husband. The sequence that ends the duet is adapted from a Japanese song to Spring and is a repeat of Butterfly's entrance motif this postlude dies away calmly leaving a hidden question mark.

Unlike *La Bohème* and *Tosca* there is no parallel duet at the end, 'there is none of the reminiscence of earlier themes which made Butterfly's suffering so poignant [...] it is as though Puccini intended us to forget Pinkerton as a lover altogether, and to concentrate on what is happening to Butterfly' (Hughes, 1959:135). That the audience expect a parallel duet and want some form of reconciliation between Butterfly and Pinkerton shows how Puccini has manipulated empathy for Butterfly. Instead Butterfly has a small duet with Pinkerton's wife in which Butterfly recalls the *I am the Happiest woman in Japan* motif except this time the words "*I am*" are changed to "*you are*".

Turandot does not have the pattern of parallel love duets either, as it is not until the last act that Turandot falls in love with Calaf. Also, as Puccini died after composing Liù's death we only have his sketches of the last two scenes which have been completed by Franco Alfano (1875-1954) and 'Alfano's task required a good deal of independent composition' (Budden, 2002: 466). The beginning of the duet starts with Calaf taking up the rhythm of Liù's funeral procession in the background as he reprimands the Princess for her cruelty and is accompanied by tutti unisons and

open fifths. The imitation of the funeral music gives credence to the idea that the death of Liù is the beginning of the thawing of Turandot.

2.4 Leitmotif

The technique of leitmotif, though evident from the late eighteenth-century, was developed by Richard Wagner (1813-1883) into a fundamental to operatic composition (Budden, 2002: Kimbell, 1991: Grey, 2008). Wagner used leitmotif as a tool to unite the varying plot nuances and often they characterised a character or place. Puccini also used this device, however whereas Wagner's music was full of these motifs that formed an intricate and detailed web that dominated the whole score, Puccini's motifs were more statements of musical naming. In fact, Puccini consistently used motifs for the association of characters and often his motifs 'do not lend themselves to the normal Wagnerian methods of transformation such as change of mode, juxtaposition, or contrapuntal combination with other motifs' (Groos and Parker, 1991:94). If Puccini were to have developed his motifs as Wagner, their affect would have been blunted as few of Puccini's motifs even lend themselves to variation as they are mostly short, incisive and often stamped by an unexpected note, harmony or rhythmic peculiarity. Puccini's simple application of leitmotif allows him to maintain a natural pace of both the drama and music. Even in Puccini's later operas 'whereby large stretches are built from spaced out repetitions of a single motif' he still does not vary and develop them in the same manner as Wagner (Budden, 2002:251). In fact, in Puccini's last opera, *Turandot*, many of the motifs (for example Turandot's entrance music and the choruses welcoming the emperor) invariably reappear exactly as they did the first time without any development. These motifs therefore, are used more as articulation and highlighters than integral music building blocks (Sadie, 1992).

Summary

Puccini used many recurring musical devices to assist in the creation of empathy and realism for his characters; stand alone arias that surprise the audience and isolate the character, parallel love duets in the first and last acts which full of enthusiasm and love in the first act yet have been tainted by the last, the verismo and attention to detail that fill Puccini's music and allow the audience to escape and finally leitmotif that name and highlight the characters giving the audience something to attach their ear to. All these devices show, as Budden stated, that 'no composer communicates more directly with an audience than Puccini' (2002:479).

Conclusion

Puccini manages to create three dimensional characters that an audience can relate to on basic and exceptionally complicated levels, compounding the idea that Puccini brought “‘all sorts and conditions of men” - the audience for which he declared he was writing - a reassurance of what it meant to be alive’ (Kimbell, 1991:634). The recurring dramatic patterns that Puccini uses really depict the human condition. These patterns show that any composer, no matter how hard they may try to be original and truthful, end up following patterns in all their works whether consciously or unconsciously. It has been remarked that Puccini was

a composer rooted in the Italian tradition of vocal melody but strongly influenced by Germanic practice in a number of respects: the use of the orchestra as a binding force over long stretches of music, the consistent association of characters with motifs or themes and the development of a more chromatic palette when required by the needs of the drama (Groos & Parker, 1991:86).

The heroines develop throughout these Puccini operas due to the situations they are placed in. Although the settings of these operas and the events that occur are not always true to life, the emotions and causes often are. Puccini’s operas, when the heightened drama and fantasy are removed, are built of characters that display real emotions that are empathetic to an audience. It is this verismo that creates a sense of profound association for Puccini’s heroines. ‘In his operas, seamstresses, gold-miners, bargees, and navvies are all poets and dreamers of dreams’ (Kimbell, 1991:633). The truth dressed as nineteenth century Rome, Bohemia, twentieth century Japan or Ancient China draws in audiences, because they want to love and hate the characters they see. Puccini allows the audience to really love the heroines as they reflect the human condition. In short Puccini ‘commanded the power of complete self-identification with his dramatic characters, notably his heroines’ (Carner, 1974:245).

Further Study

So the question now is, if everything Puccini puts on the page can create such empathy in an audience does it matter how the singer performs?

Well of course there are some singers that can sing twinkle little star and make an audience weep and others that could sing every nuance a composer puts in the score and still leave an audience stoney faced. There are two parts that make the difference between these kind of singers; vocal prowess and acting believability. An audience may forgive the occasional vocal slip if the singer is totally believable as the character in that moment. However, if the singer steps away from the character and shows their true self then they lose the audience. Once the audience is lost its hard to wrap them back in the world of the opera, be it the wilds of bohemia or the exotic-ness of Japan. So the singer needs believability and vocal dexterity. The music that Puccini wrote for all his heroines is vocally demanding, Puccini wrote in the bel canto style which requires definite skill and training from the singer to produce a continuous legato line. The singers also need huge stamina as well, as most of Puccini's heroines sing for almost the entirety of the operas; especially Tosca (who is the only female member of cast), Mimi and Butterfly. So its a fairly rare caliber of singer that can sing the whole role technically convincingly anyway, before you even attempt to judge their acting ability. However once you find the singer that can do both they are the ones that bring Puccini's music alive.

Famously Maria Callas' 1953 studio recording of Tosca, still leaves audiences speechless and yet was it because of Puccini leading the way or because Tosca and she had such similar traits. As Gurewitsch said "most mysterious among her many gifts, Callas had the genius to translate the

minute particulars of a life into tone of voice" (Gurewitsch, 1999). It is a highly contentious issue that Callas might be the ultimate Tosca and indeed a view many would challenge.

So as a singer, when you start to sing *Butterfly* or *Tosca* or *Mimi* does it matter if you know that Puccini embeds empathy for his heroines into the score? Probably not, for no singer that comes to these roles will ever try to sing them without opening their soul to them and the audience. Taking that as read, the singer and Puccini go hand in hand to the audience and try their hardest to draw them in to these fragile worlds they weave around them. However few singers these days do no study around the role they're singing, even if that only means translating it into their own language and really connecting with the text. A real knowledge of the libretto is half the battle in understanding the role. It enables the singer to see the heroines extroverted character find its frailty or their introverted character find inner strength. Once the understanding is understood of these desperate women then comes the ability to believably portray them. Therefore most singers probably gather as much intuition of their characters from looking at the score and the libretto as they ever would reading books about Puccini's writing style or harmonic devices.

Conclusion

In the end if Verdi or Wagner, Mozart or any other of the truly great and beloved operatic composers had written *La Bohème* or *Tosca* or *Turando* or *Madame Butterfly* then they would probably have been good operas but they wouldn't have had Puccini's flare or obsession for verisimilitude. Puccini's writing is what makes it his, but the singer is what brings the music off the page and brings it to the audience. If the singer fails to draw the audience in and use every nuance of Puccini's writing then the audience will fail to understand these heroines and the journeys they undertake. Then every bit of Puccini's care and attention to the characters and story is lost.

As in real life, these women's unquestioning sense of trust and loyalty is, in all likelihood, their downfall. It appears that all Puccini's women, who are passionately and completely in love, die. Puccini saw 'that he was stimulated by young women suffering for love and was at his best musically when, as he wrote to a friend "I act as executioner to these poor frail creatures"' (Martin, 1980:31). It is the singers job to be these women and show Puccini's thoughts. The innocence of these woman and the empathy they create may not be what damns them but it certainly does not save them.

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