

UArkMusic

University Symphony Orchestra

Jason Burrow, *Conductor*

Dr. Christopher Agwu, *Conductor*

Inspirational Chorale

Dr. Jeffrey Murdock, *Conductor*

Schola Cantorum

Dr. Jillian Harrison-Jones, *Conductor*

Razorback and Treble Choruses

Dr. Jillian Harrison-Jones, *Conductor*

Arkansas Master Chorale

Dr. Jillian Harrison-Jones, *Conductor*

Masterwork Concert

4.27.26 | 7:30 PM

Faulkner Performing Arts Center

PROGRAM

Overture from *Candide* (1956)

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

Jason Burrow, Conductor

Saxophone Concerto

Aleksandr Glazunov (1865-1936)

Shelby Kook, Saxophone

Dr. Christopher Agwu, Conductor

INTERMISSION

L'elisir d'amore

Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)

"Bel conforto al mietitore"

"Benedette queste carte"

Kathryn Cooper, Soprano

Dr. Justin Kroll, Tenor

Carmen

Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

"Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre"

Dr. Jonathan Stinson, Baritone

Nabucco

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

"Va pensiero"

Il Trovatore

"Anvil Chorus"

Die Zauberflöte

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

"O Isis und Osiris"

(1756-1791)

Dr. Jonathan Stinson, Baritone

Turandot

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

"Nessun Dorma"

Dr. Justin Kroll, Tenor

Dr. Jeffrey Murdock, Conductor

"O sole! Vita! Eternità!"

Dr. Lenora Green-Turner, Soprano

Dr. Jeffrey Murdock, Conductor



Jason Burrow, Conductor

Jason Burrow is Associate Professor of Musical Theatre at the University of Arkansas in the Department of Theatre and has performed as a pianist and singer with Grammy and Tony award winning artists including Mariah Carey, the Broadway Inspirational Voices, and Sting. Most recently Jason was on two North American tours of *Hamilton* as a Music Director and Conductor. Jason taught at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts before returning to Arkansas, his home state, to teach at the U of A. Jason received his Bachelor of Music Education degree from the University of Arkansas and Master of Music degrees from Ohio University. Jason is an active voice teacher, member of NATS, and serves as faculty for the LoVetri Institute for Somatic Voicework™.



Dr. Christopher Agwu, Conductor

Christopher Agwu is a music educator, conductor, and clinician from the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, currently serving as the Assistant Director of Bands at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. Christopher graduated with his Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory, where he studied with his teacher and mentor, Steven D. Davis. Before attending UMKC Conservatory, he received his Bachelor of Music Education from the University of North Texas, where he studied trumpet with John Holt and Keith Johnson and conducting with Dr. Nicholas Enrico Williams, and his Master of Musical Arts at Texas Tech University, where he studied conducting with his teacher, mentor, and good friend Dr. Sarah McKoin.

Between receiving his Bachelor's degree and his Master's degree, Christopher taught in the North Texas area in the Plano Independent School District and the Lewisville Independent School District. Christopher has also stayed active in the marching and pageantry arts since marching with the World Class Drum Corps Boston Crusaders in 2003 and the Phantom Regiment in the years 2006 and 2007. He is now on the Educational Brass Staff with the World Class Blue Stars Drum and Bugle Corps. The ensembles he has worked with or led have been finalists and/or champions in WGI, BOA, and DCI regional and national competitions. He also continues to serve as a clinician, consultant, guest conductor, and adjudicator for concert and marching ensembles around the country.

Christopher strongly believes in the power that music has in creating community among people from all walks of life. Through this belief, he strives to use his love for making music with others as a means of positively developing himself, those with whom he collaborates, and the audience members who experience the music.



Dr. Jeffrey Murdock, Conductor

Dr. Jeffrey Allen Murdock is internationally known as a conductor and clinician. He currently serves as Director of Choral Activities, Professor of Music, and founding director of the Arkansas Center for Black Music at the University of Arkansas. He is the 2016 Connor Endowed Faculty Fellow in the J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Science, and 2019 Most Outstanding Faculty at the University of Arkansas. He is the 2021 GRAMMY Music Educator of the Year.

Dr. Murdock has conducted regional and state honor choirs, and headlined conferences in 26 states and 8 countries. With research interests including of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in the Choral Classroom, Music in Urban Schools, and Social Justice in Music Education, he has presented at state, regional and national conferences of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), the International Society for Music Education (ISME), and the American Choral Directors Association, where he serves as president of the Southwestern Division, past-president of Arkansas ACDA, and serves on the national diversity subcommittee. Choirs under Dr. Murdock's direction have performed at the Arkansas All-State Conference and the Southwestern Division Conference of the American Choral Directors Association. In addition to being an accomplished conductor of western choral music, Dr. Murdock is also a skilled gospel musician and conductor. He has served on the conducting staff of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., has collaborated with numerous world-renowned Gospel recording artists. Dr. Murdock holds a Bachelor's degree in Music Education and a Master of Music degree in Choral Conducting, both from the University of Southern Mississippi, and a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in Music Education from the University of Memphis.



Shelby Kook, Saxophone

Shelby Kook is a saxophonist and educator currently pursuing a Master of Music in saxophone performance at the University of Arkansas under the tutelage of Dr. Sarah Hetrick. She holds a Bachelor of Music Education degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she previously studied with Dr. Nicki Roman and Professor Debra Richtmeyer.

As an active chamber and ensemble musician, Shelby has performed with leading university ensembles and chamber groups. She currently performs with the University of Arkansas Wind Ensemble and is the alto chair of the Adamas Facet Saxophone Quartet.

Passionate about using evidence based pedagogy and culturally responsive approaches, Shelby teaches private saxophone lessons with a goal to support student growth in technical ability, enhanced musicality, and self confidence.

In addition to her teaching and performing, Shelby is committed to advocacy and community outreach. She serves as an outreach coordinator for the newly formed group, Women of Color in Classical Saxophone, encouraging diversity and representation in the classical saxophone community.



Kathryn Cooper, Soprano

Kathryn Cooper is a soprano currently pursuing a master's degree in Vocal Performance at the University of Arkansas, studying with Dr. Lenora Green-Turner. Beginning her vocal journey as a child studying musical theatre, she discovered her passion for opera in her undergraduate at University of Arizona, where she studied with Dr. Andrew Stuckey and earned bachelor's degrees in Theatre Studies and Music. Previous performances include Adele (Die Fledermaus), chorus roles in Dido & Aeneas and Thumbprint, and originating the role of Lilia in the world premiere of Michael J. Vince's Hinterkaifeck with the University of Arizona Opera Theatre, and Dorabella (The Bremen Town Musicians), Lucinda (Into the Woods), Dodo (The Merry Widow), and a chorus role in Carmen in Opera in the Ozarks' 75th season. Most recently, she prepared the role of Adina (L'Elisir d'Amore) and managed the educational tour of The Three Bears with the University of Arkansas Opera Theatre.



Dr. Jonathan Stinson, Baritone

Dr. Jonathan Stinson, baritone, has appeared in leading and supporting roles with opera companies throughout the United States and in Europe, including Cincinnati Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Central City Opera, Winter Opera St. Louis, Kentucky Opera, Opera Omaha, Opera Memphis, Dayton Opera, and Cleveland Opera. Abroad, he has sung the role of Don Magnifico in *La cenerentola* and the title role of Don Giovanni in Italy, the title role of Rigoletto in the UK, and Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* and the title role of Gianni Schicchi in Bulgaria. Recent roles include Marcello in *La bohème*, Lescaut in *Manon Lescaut*, Don Giovanni and Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, Don Magnifico in *La cenerentola*, Figaro and Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Tobias Mill in *La cambiale di matrimonio*, Olin Bitch in *Floyd's Susannah*, Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore*. In July of 2026, Dr. Stinson will perform Dulcamara in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* in Le Mans, France. Dr. Stinson is a past Regional Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and received the "Bel Canto Award" at the Orpheus National Voice Competition. He is currently a Teaching Associate Professor of Voice and the Director of Opera Theatre at the University of Arkansas.



Dr. Lenora Green-Turner, Soprano

American soprano, Lenora Green-Turner, is recognized as one of America's most loved sopranos with her full, warm, gorgeous, lyrical voice. Critics and audiences are drawn to listen for more desirable sounds like hers. Green-Turner is hailed by Opera News as an impressive vocalist and NYTimes as a most expressive singer. "When Lenora sings, it is apparent that she is an indulgence the audience can wholeheartedly support," NOLA Defender, Louisiana. Along with the Symphony of Northwest Arkansas under the baton of Paul Haas, Lenora has been a featured soloist collaborating with Maestro John Jeter and Fort Smith Symphony Orchestra. Her opera roles include Mimi, Mary (Highway 1, U. S. A.), Countess Susanna (Il Segreto di Susanna), Donna Anna, Suor Angelica, and Antonia. Awards: Jane Willson Emerging Artist, Sarasota Opera Guild; and Metropolitan Opera and NATS. Former Artist-In-Residence for Stax Music Academy, LeMoyne-Owen College, and Opera Memphis; Dr. Green-Turner earned her DMA and MM from University of Michigan, and Performance Diploma from Indiana University. A member of EXIGENCE (Dr. Eugene Rogers) and TACTUS (Dr. Warren Puffer Jones), she is the business owner of Green Room Studios, LLC; on the voice faculty at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, AR where she resides with her husband Anthony and daughter Addie.



Dr. Justin Kroll, Tenor

Praised by the Miami Herald for his “penetrating tenor,” “Justin Kroll shines” (Ladue

News) in a wide range of lyric tenor repertoire on both the operatic stage and in the concert hall.

Recent operatic performances include such roles as Tamino (Der Zauberflöte, Painted Sky Opera), Don José (Carmen, Tulsa Opera), Riccardo Percy (Anna Bolena, Winter Opera St Louis), Nemorino (L’elisir d’amore, Landlocked Opera), Malcolm (Macbeth, Opera Idaho), The Priest (The Light in the Piazza, Central City Opera), and Arturo (Lucia di Lammermoor, Madison Opera). Justin will debut as the Duke of Mantua in Verdi’s Rigoletto with Heartland Opera Theatre in Joplin, Missouri in May 2026, and as Alfredo in Verdi’s La Traviata with Painted Sky Opera in August 2026.

In concert, Justin has appeared as soloist with Canterbury Voices & the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, the Missouri Symphony, the Southern Arizona Symphony, and the Madison Symphony as the Dying Swan in Orff’s Carmina Burana.

An active competition singer, Justin was the 3rd place winner in the 2025 Edward M. Murray International Competition of Voice at Opera Ithaca, and 4th place winner in the 6th Palm Springs (California) Opera Guild Competition. Justin has represented the United States abroad as a prize winner in the 8th Linus Lerner International Voice Competition in Guadalajara, Mexico, and as a quarter-finalist in the 6th UNISA (University of South Africa) International Voice Competition in Pretoria, South Africa.

Originally from Marlin, Texas, Justin holds the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Voice Performance from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Master of Music degree in Voice Performance and the Bachelor of Music degree in Music History and Literature from Baylor University, and the Associate of Arts degree with a field study in Music from McLennan Community College. Justin is currently Assistant Professor of Voice and Director of Opera Workshop at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

University Symphony Orchestra

Personnel

Violin I

Trinity Charlton
Albert Garcia Delgadillio+
Kenny Garner
Thomas Henry
Annaliese Montgomery
Lucy Mae Rousseau
Max Shive
Ben Weir

Violin II

Landon Barker
Alec Barnum
Harper Berzon
Phoebe Drinkard
Campbell Lewis
Tammy Nguyen
Ella Stratman
Addison Winesburg+

Viola

Ryan Davis
Angel Duron+
Shaylee Ford-Wutzke
Emily Hornick
Kancana Kathiravan
Gisell Maldonado

Cello

Seth Antuna
Chloe Hubbard
Jonathan Lea+
Hayden Melchiori
Nicole Patrao

Contrabass

Freeman Boatright
Gabriela Gomez
Jack Minnick+
Patricio Silva

Flute

Kendall Fisher+
Alton Holscher
Ava Jane Murphy, piccolo

Oboe

Logan Blalack+
Keri Brewington
Mallory Willard
Lime Whitlow

Clarinet

Henry Aguilar-Orellana
Cadence Davis, Eb clar
Braeden Morris,
Kendall Norman
Garland Watson+, Bass clar

Bassoon

Michael Keen
Romy Ftaiti+
Isabella Sharp,
contrabassoon

Trumpet

Emma Duncan+
Jack Lockhart
Nathan Steinmuller

Horn

Ben Cartwright
Chris Dorner
Landon Geitzenauer+
Jubilee Killian
Austin Rushing
Hudson Worley

Trombone

Mac Dishman
Aammar Khan, Bass trombone
Jackson Kuphal+

Tuba

Robert Anderson+

Percussion

Steve Abochale
Jack Hinkson+
Grace Flener
Ezra Taylor
Aundre Wesley

+ denotes principal player

Arkansas Master Chorale

Personnel

Leah Allen
Dani Babcock
Rebecca Baker
Robbie Baker
Demara Banks
Ariel Barton
Ginger Beck
Dr. Dennis Brewer
Rose Brown
Kirra Fluegel
David Franks
Laura Gehrke
Dr. Patricia Gross
Audrey Hewitt
Emily Hogue
Chloe Honeycutt
Shanti Hossain
Jane Huston
Tommye Jones

Shana Kasperek
Angela LaPorte
Carson Leavitt
Dongho Lee
Liz Lester
Annette Lewis
Grace Lindquist
Jana Mayfield
Katherine Murdock
Ashley Perkiins
Cindy Rauth
Alex Rouw
Meribeth Schaap
Rachael Schaffner
Ethel Simpson
Elizabeth Strandberg
Jack Vestal
Addison Yates
Chris Yutzy

Schola Cantorum

Personnel

Tess Barborek
Peter Black
Amelia Booker
Emma Breaux
Kalista Brown
Nolan Bryant
Luke Burnside
Ashlyn Burrer
Kameron Cheng
Evan Collier
Harper Combs
Katheryn Cooper
Nathan Edwards
Isabel Fuentes
Evan Goforth
McKinley Graves
Alex Hoang
Ashlyn Hodge
Hannah Horton
Idaly Jimenez
Mia Johnson
Verna Labitad
Jackson Landers
Lillie Large

Nash Lawhon
Austin Letterman
Isabel MacLean
Christian Mathews
Victoria Melchor
Madison Moss
Emma Norman
Olivia Parker
Blake Powers
Carter Price
Jazlin Redding
Griffin Reedy
Jackson Rowell
Emma Scott
Edwin Soto
Sabra Staggs
Jagger Thompson
Peyton Tomlin
Bryles Tucker
Sienna Walton
Dustin Warner
Aundre Wesley
Kevin Willis
Giovanni Zamora-Reyes

Inspirational Chorale

Personnel

Amelia Booker

Ariel Bronson

Alayna Brown

Ashlee Capshaw

Connor Clayton

Evan Collier

Bianca Euler

Evan Goforth

Avery Hamlin

Olivia Hamlin

Christopher Henley

Jess Hicks

Hannah Horton

Corey Hunter

McKayla Lemon

David Lykins

Trey Marvin

Emma Massengale

Christian Mathews

Victoria Melchor

Danny Miller

Andrew Neff

Ozell Penton

Hope People

Drew Pirtle

Blake Powers

Lauren Ramsey

Edwin Soto Jr

Nicholas Tidwell

Alyssa Triplett

Brennan Wilkins

Gabriel Garnier

Keiko Yoshiki

Jalen Brooks

Jackson Cawthon

Christian Conway

Madeleine Clevenger

Victoria Daniels

Lily Dupuis

Shawn Eary

Georgia Jane Gilbert

Leah Hopkins

Joi Johnson

Olivia Karsten

Tatianna Pointer

Madison Watson

Savannah Wells

Treble Chorus

Personnel

Natalia Botille	Lauryn Reddick
Kailey Chandler	Samantha Sabin
Grace Flener	Lauren Stockley
McKinley Graves	Emma Ulrich
Addison Hash	Shoshiana Vang
DeeDee Lannutti	Emma Ward
Campbell Leiterman	Megan Watt
Shay Mac	Addison Winesburg
Kimberly Marx	Abigail Wood
Ayla Morrison	

Razorback Chorus

Personnel

Seth Antuna	Angel Duron
Jaxon Anderson	Jacob Giesbrecht
Connor Arterberry	Cujo Gonzalez
Landon Barker	Nathan Koch
Jackson Brunner	Asher Lairmore
Nolan Bryant	Wren Larsen
Jackson Cameron	Danny Miller
Cooper Chiddister	Austin Rushing
Jackson Clupny	Donovan Smith
Evan Collie	Luis Solana de Almeida
Sam Couey	Josue Todd
Mac Dishman	Nate Wittke

Overture to Candide

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

The troubles and adventures of Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* are nearly as varied and pitiable as those of Voltaire's optimistic hero. Lillian Hellman may have suggested collaborating on *Candide* to Bernstein as early as 1950, a time when the composer was much involved in music theater projects. This was also the period when *West Side Story* was gestating.

Thoroughly enthused about *Candide*, Bernstein persuaded Hellman to adapt it as a neo-Classical operetta, rather than the play with incidental music that she had envisioned. After a few out-of-town performances, the new work opened in New York City December 1, 1956. It closed less than three months later, after 73 performances. For a contemporary opera, that would have been a phenomenal run – for a Broadway show, it was a flop, for which Hellman's book received most of the blame.

Whatever the travails of *Candide* as a whole, its overture has become a hugely popular concert classic. (The New York Philharmonic, in honor of its former music director, now has a tradition of playing the *Candide* Overture without a conductor.) Though it does touch on some of the show's great tunes, the dashing overture is also a shapely sonata form with points of canonic imitation and a sparkling Rossini crescendo to close.

— John Henken

Concerto for Saxophone

Aleksandr Glazunov (1865-1936)

Although invented in the early 1840s, the saxophone was still fairly new and unfamiliar in Glazunov's day; it remained untouched for a long time as it was considered "middle class". However, Glazunov was enthralled by the sound of the saxophone: a new timbre in the musical world.

The work premiered in Nyköping, Sweden, on 25 November 1934, with Sigurd Raschèr, a famous German saxophonist, as soloist. It is Raschèr who is credited for bringing about the concerto's composition. He hounded Glazunov for a saxophone concerto, so much so that the composer wrote to a colleague that he had started the piece in March "under the influences of attacks rather than requests from the Danish (sic) saxophonist named Sigurd Rascher". He completed the work in June 1934.

Glazunov almost certainly never heard his Saxophone Concerto publicly performed, as the first Paris performance of the work did not occur until after his death.

L'elisir d'amore

Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)

An ancient legend, a potion of questionable origin, and a single tear: sometimes that's all you need to live happily ever after. When Gaetano Donizetti and Felice Romani—among the most famous Italian composers and librettists of their day, respectively, joined forces in 1832 to adapt a French comic opera for the Italian stage, the result was nothing short of magical. An effervescent mixture of tender young love, unforgettable characters, and some of the most delightful music ever written, L'Elisir d'Amore (The Elixir of Love) quickly became the most popular opera in Italy.

-Metropolitan Opera

Carmen

Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

Georges Bizet was one of those composers who showed precocious brilliance as a child but never lived long enough to completely fulfill the promise. The difference, however, between Bizet and Mozart, who died at about the same age, is that Mozart left more than 600 completed compositions, many of them masterpieces, while Bizet is known primarily for a single work: *Carmen*.

Based on a contemporary novella by Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen* is the story of a fickle and promiscuous seductress who ensnares an innocent young soldier into a passion that leads inexorably to his desertion, degradation and finally a jealous murder on stage. While other French composers, such as Daniel François Auber and Ambroise Thomas, routinely presented such characters on stage, they were handled discreetly and in accordance with prevailing morality: The guy with the black hat mended his ways, the hero resisted temptation, and the poor but virtuous girl remained virtuous. By contrast, Bizet retained Mérimée's realism, giving the characters darker emotions and poor self-control.

In *Votre toast* from Act II, the toreador Escamillo struts into the inn with his groupies, singing a rousing aria of self-promotion.

—Program notes by Joseph & Elizabeth Kahn

Nabucco

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Nabucco was Verdi's first success. Composed in 1842, when the 29-year-old composer had just endured some crushing failures and was on the verge of giving up composing, Nabucco proved so successful that it was given 57 times during the following season, and within 10 years it had been produced throughout Europe and as far away as New York and Buenos Aires.

The opera tells of Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem and of the plight of the Jews in their Babylonian captivity. (The Italian word for Nebuchadnezzar is the unwieldy and almost unsingable Nabucodonosor, and so Verdi and his librettist Temistocle Solera shortened it to Nabucco.) The opera is remarkable for its dramatic use of the chorus, which has some of the best music in the opera.

The opera's most famous music, the chorus *Va, pensiero*, is sung by the Jews during their Babylonian captivity in Part 3. Its first lines set the tone of nostalgic longing that have made it so popular:

Fly, thought, on golden wings;
rest upon the slopes and hills,
where, soft and mild, the air
of our native land smells sweet!
-Eric Bromberger

Il Trovatore

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

First performed in Rome in 1853, *Il Trovatore* has become one of the most famous operas ever composed, despite (or perhaps because of) its really horrifying events, such as a woman and babies burned to death, false imprisonment, bloody revenge, and some spectacular cases of mistaken identity gone tragically wrong.

The Anvil Chorus, one of the opera's most famous moments, comes at the beginning of Act II. A group of gypsies stirs to life as dawn breaks on their encampment in the mountains of Spain, and as the day brightens they sing this lusty chorus in praise of wine, hard work, and the beauty of gypsy women. The men start fires, heat sword blades, and pound them with hammers as they sing, and a nice feature of Verdi's setting is the fact that the clink of their hammers comes on the off-beat rather than the downbeat. The tune of that chorus has taken on a life of its own, from its use in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* to becoming the tune of the American popular song "Hail! Hail! The gang's all here."

—Eric Bromberger

Die Zauberflöte

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

In 1791, although afflicted by ill-health, Mozart reached for his quill again at the request of his friend and fellow-Mason Emanuel Schikaneder – and landed a hit: The Magic Flute.

Schikaneder wanted Mozart to write a popular opera to his libretto of The Magic Flute. Zauberstücke (fairytale extravaganzas) were very fashionable at that time in Vienna, and made liberal use of artificial thunder and various machines for their effects. Papageno, a Hanswurst-like figure who was played by Schikaneder himself, clowned around in audience-pleasing fashion and sang comic numbers.

At the same time, however, the opera is a paean to the ideas of Freemasonry. It contains elements of the Egyptomania that was sweeping Europe at the time: Egypt was held to be a fount of secret knowledge and mysteries, and was a centre of reference for the ideas of the Freemasons.

Mozart was already gravely ill while he was composing the opera, but conducted the first performance from the piano himself. Sold out at each performance, it was a triumphant success: it premiered on 30 September 1791 and was performed thirty-five times up to the beginning of December. Even Antonio Salieri attended a performance. The box-office takings were so high that Schikaneder was able to build the Theater an der Wien, which opened in 1801.

-Julia Teresa Friehs

The aria O Isis und Osiris is sung by Sarastro, the high priest of Isis and Osiris. Sarastro announces that prince Tamino, before marrying Pamina, must prove himself worthy to the temple. Sarastro prays for Tamino in his coming ordeal: O Isis und Osiris.

Turandot

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Turandot was Puccini's last work and is a mainstay of the operatic canon. Even if you've never seen Turandot, you know "Nessun dorma," arguably one of the most famous arias ever written and a musical high point in the opera. When Luciano Pavarotti fell ill at the 1998 Grammy Awards, Aretha Franklin stepped in at the last minute and sang a glorious rendition in Pavarotti's stead, leading the Queen of Soul to incorporate "Nessun dorma" into her repertoire and recordings.

But there is more to the opera than this one aria—musically and conceptually. In brief, the opera is about a powerful Chinese princess, Turandot, who invites any suitor to marry her if they correctly solve three riddles—or face a gruesome death. Many suitors attempt to win the princess, only to face execution for failing to solve the riddles, until she finally meets her match in Prince Calaf.

Turandot is an Italian verismo opera... about a Chinese princess... which is based on a commedia dell'arte play... which took its subject matter from a Persian story of a Russian princess... which was collected and published by a French folklorist.

So, not exactly an authentic representation of Chinese culture. It also turns out to be a story that reinforces some problematic stereotypes not just about China, but also about women.

Although Puccini had never been to China, he tracked down various Chinese folk tunes and anthems that appear throughout Turandot, including one that serves as a kind of leitmotif for Turandot herself.

-National Symphony Orchestra

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