

## TURANDOT – SYNOPSIS

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### ACT I

Turandot, daughter of Emperor Altoum, has decreed that she will only marry if a suitor of noble blood can answer three riddles. If he cannot, the price will be his head. The most recent failed candidate, the Prince of Persia, is to be executed at the moon's rising. In the commotion outside the palace a blind man falls to the ground, and his companion, Liù, asks for help. They are aided by a disguised Calaf, who recognizes the man as his long-lost father, Timur, the banished ruler of his land. Calaf, like his father, is running from enemies and concealing his identity, known only as the Unknown Prince. Liù continues to aid Timur even in exile because years before, as she explains, Calaf bestowed a smile upon her.

The people impatiently await the beheading. As the Prince of Persia enters, the crowd is suddenly moved and pleads with the princess to pardon him. Turandot appears and dispassionately confirms the prince's sentence with a silent gesture. Calaf is immediately entranced by her beauty. Timur and Liù try to convince him to leave with them, but he breaks away and attempts to announce himself as a suitor. The three ministers of the Imperial Household, Ping, Pang and Pong, warn him of his folly, but to no avail. In one final attempt Liù begs him to listen, but Calaf ignores her entreaties and ceremoniously rings the gong, signifying his challenge for Turandot's hand.

### ACT II

Ping, Pang and Pong prepare for the eventuality of a wedding or a funeral. They discuss their misery since Turandot reached a marriageable age, numbering the many noble suitors who have met a deadly fate while reminiscing about life in their native provinces. Is there truly a man whose passion can melt Turandot's icy heart? Their hopes are guarded.

A crowd assembles for the trial of the Three Enigmas. Turandot devised this manner of courtship to avenge her ancestress, Lo-u Ling, who was captured, raped, then put to death by marauding invaders. She offers Calaf one last chance to withdraw, but he stands firm in his resolve. The first question is offered: "What is born each night and dies each dawn?" Calaf correctly answers, "Hope." Slightly taken aback, Turandot poses the next riddle: "What flares warm like a flame, yet it is no flame?" Calaf hesitates, then answers perfectly, "Blood." Visibly shaken, Turandot asks the final question: "The ice that gives you fire, what can it be?" Calaf hesitates, then triumphantly cries: "Turandot!" The people celebrate his victory, but Turandot pleads with the Emperor not to be given to this unknown entity. Seeing her distress Calaf decides to play her game and offers a riddle of his own: "If before morning you can discover the name I bear, I shall forfeit my life."

### ACT III

It is decreed that none shall sleep, under penalty of death, until the name of the Unknown Prince is discovered. Calaf expresses his conviction that he alone will reveal the secret. Ping, Pang and Pong offer any prize, including his safe escape, if he tells them his name. Having been seen with Calaf, Timur and Liù are captured, and at Turandot's request Timur is to be tortured until he reveals the truth. Liù steps forward and says that she knows the prince's name but will keep it as her eternal secret. She grabs a soldier's dagger and kills herself. Calaf reproaches the princess for her cruelty and then takes hold of her and boldly kisses her. Turandot's strength and desire for revenge leave her, and she weeps for the first time. Calaf reveals his true identity, thereby putting his life in Turandot's hands. Trumpets announce the arrival of dawn and the assembly of the court.

Turandot addresses the emperor and the people: "I have discovered the stranger's name – it is Love!"