

October 23, 2017: Giacomo Puccini, *Turandot* (1926)

### Exoticism

- Imitation of sounds, scales, or timbres from another culture
- Escape from the predictability of local music; sounds new and fashionable

The word “exoticism” comes from Greek: *exōtikos* (stranger, far away, foreign), into English from French (1552)

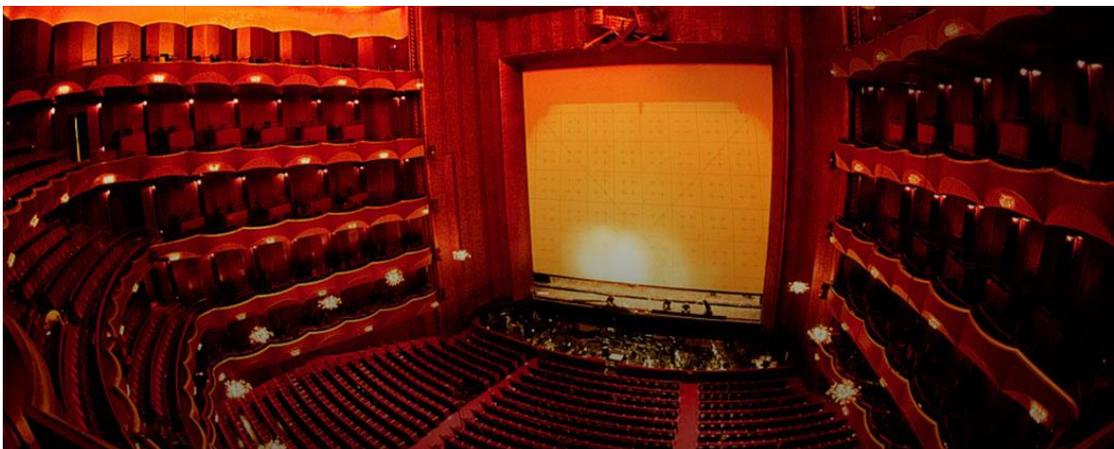
- In the arts: using an exotic setting (where the artist and his/her audience are not located) to create a sense of shock, fascination, enticement/allure, or freedom from the trappings of modern world, society, or one’s rigid life
- Often drawing from European countries’ colonies or a long-forgotten past
- Literature: Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* (1721); Gustave Flaubert, *Salaambô* (1862); Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book* (1894)
- Music: Giuseppe Verdi, *Aïda* (1870); Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado* (1885); Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *Capriccio espagnol* (1887), *Scheherazade* (1888); Giacomo Puccini, *Madama Butterfly* (1903), *La fanciulla del West* (1910); Maurice Ravel, *Rhapsodie espagnole* (1908), *Tzigane for Violin and Orchestra* (1924); Claude Debussy, “Pagodes” from *Estampes* (1903), *Syrinx* (1913); Igor Stravinsky, *The Firebird* (1910), *The Rite of Spring* (1913), *Ragtime for 11 Instruments* (1918)

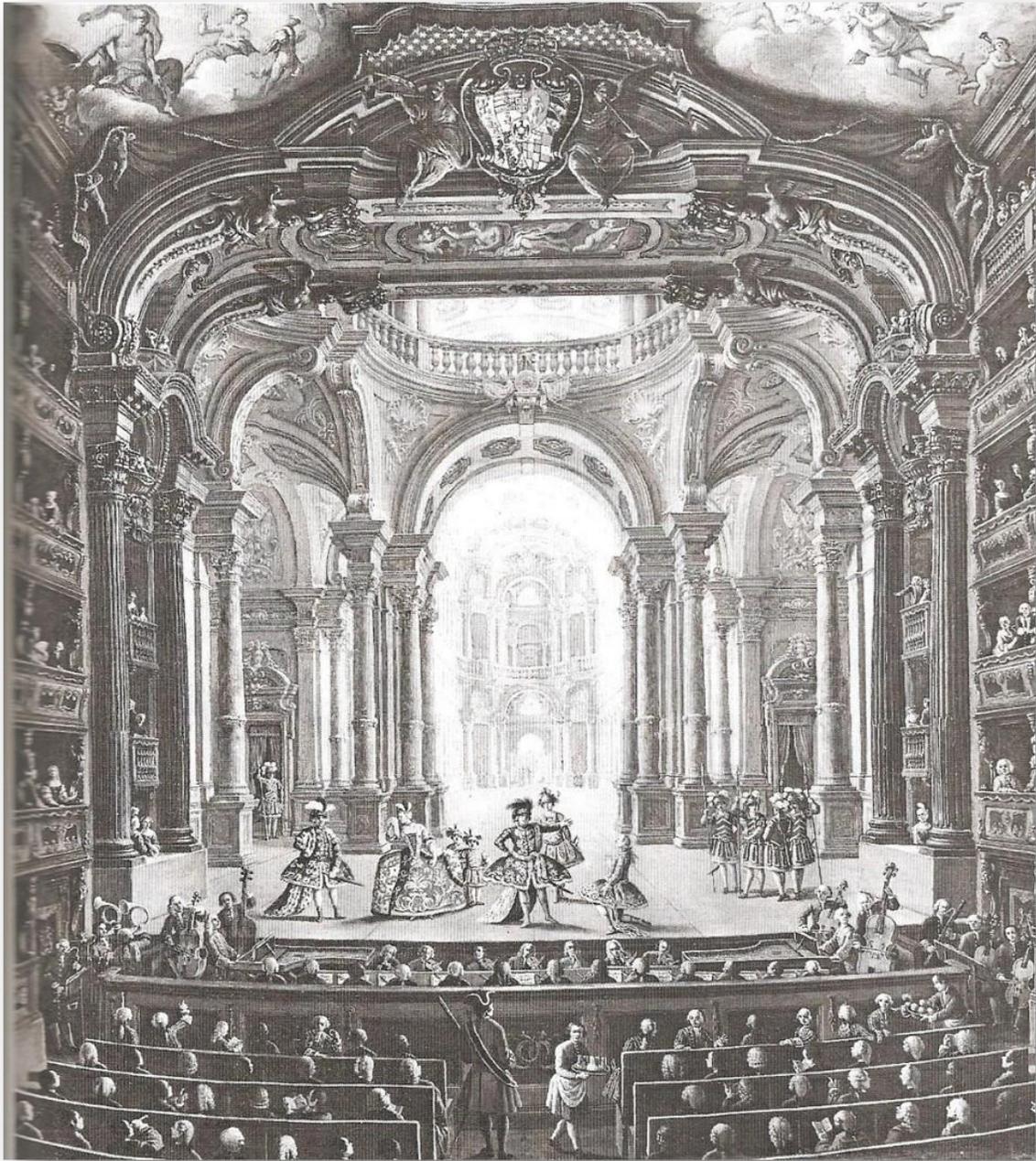
Opera is a genre of music in use since the Baroque period

- Seamless combination of orchestral playing, solo singing (aria and recitative), ensemble singing (duets, trios, quartets, chorus)
- Theater: costumes, staging, choreography, props, plot
- Heightened drama and comedy
- Popular art
- Social activity

Metropolitan Opera (“The Met”)

- Established in 1880, moved to Lincoln Center in 1966
- 27 rotating productions in a season: 7 performances per week of 4 shows
- 800,000 audience members per year





Teatro Regio (Turin, Italy), 1740

### Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

- Italian composer of opera
- Entire family consisted of musicians, starting with his great-great-grandfather, Giacomo Puccini (1712-84)
- Studied at the Milan Conservatory
- Major works:
  - *Manon Lescaut* (1893), set in New Orleans, Louisiana (US)
  - *La bohème* (1896), set in Paris
  - *Tosca* (1900), an early example of *verismo* (operas based in reality, using down-to-earth characters and their emotions) set in Rome
  - *Madama Butterfly* (1904), set in Japan
  - *La fanciulla del West* (1910), set in California during the gold rush
- Third among composers after Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Giuseppe Verdi in terms of number of operas performed every year; *La bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly* are in the top 10 of operas performed annually
- Criticism against Puccini: “He willingly stops himself at minor genius, stroking the taste of the public ... obstinately shunning too-daring innovation ... A little heroism, but not taken to great heights; a little bit of veristic comedy, but brief; a lot of sentiment and romantic idyll: this is the recipe in which he finds happiness.” (*La stampa*, 1903)



### *Turandot* (1921-26)

- Based on a story about a woman in Persia (now Iran) named Turandokht, but set in Beijing (Peking) in “legendary times”
- Large orchestra – rich array of sounds
- *Leitmotifs* (melodies associated with different ideas, characters, or feelings) recur throughout the opera – this is a musical idea that originated in the works of Richard Wagner (1813-83)
- Uses Chinese music to add exotic flavor and transport the (European) audience to a faraway place (e.g., *Mo Li Hua* “Jasmine Flower”)
- Plot: The princess (Turandot) refuses to marry any man who cannot answer her three riddles and has any man who fails executed. Calaf (a prince) falls in love with her at first sight and tries to answer her three riddles. Everyone begs him not to throw his life away: Timur, his father (a king), Liù (a servant who is in love with Calaf), and Ping, Pang, and Pong (servants of Turandot). Calaf is able to answer Turandot’s riddles, but she does not want to marry him. Calaf tells her that if she can figure out his name, she can have him executed instead. Turandot has Timur and Liù tortured to reveal Calaf’s name, but Liù kills herself instead. Calaf decides to tell Turandot his name, and instead of having him killed, she decides to love him in return.
- Was not performed in China until 1998 because it was considered to be an unfavorable depiction of the country.
- Puccini died before he could finish composing the opera, and several different composers have created different endings to the opera: Franco Alfano (1926), Janet Maguire (1988), Luciano Berio (2001), Hao Weiya (2008)