

IX

Il suo nome è... Amor!

Sein Name ist...Liebe!

His name is... Love!

••

*Yes! They say truly that he will reconcile night and day
Guide the starry heaven up and down, eternally,
Forever joyful, like the leaf of the evergreen spruce-tree,
Which he loves, like the wreath of ivy that he chose,
Because it stays and brings the trace of the gods who fled
down through the darkness to the godless.*

*When, some time ago – long, to us, it seems – ,
Sorrow spread over the earth, and rightfully so,
And a quiet Spirit appeared and then left behind some
gifts,...
As a sign that He had once been there and would come
again:
Bread is the fruit of the earth, yet it is blessed by the Light,
And from the thundering god comes the joy of the Wine.
Whoever beholds it: believe!
Blissful sages see it; a smile shines forth from the captive
Soul: Their eyes can still warm to that light....*

“Brod und Wein,” IX

MOONLIGHTING IN *TURANDOT*

pic after 9 BW, befor e9a

Need something really positive to offset thousand cuts pic: Wondrous Love?
Mickey conducts;

Requiem posters here, rather than before VIIIc?

IX • IL SUO NOME È...AMOR!

His name is love.

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

Something I found odd, at first, about the opera people I came to know was how unreflective they were, or at least appeared to be. While many of them made their leftism apparent in their recurrent jibes about national politics, they had no difficulty at all dismissing the rather politically incorrect content of their art as just part of sparing nothing to advance its beauty. Love, as practiced and defined in Grand Opera, would be hell to Gloria Steinem and, if they were to reflect about it, to most women who sing in operas. But they don't care when they're doing it. In the wings during the kiss scene I kidded with some chorus women, and they with me, about "what women need" and Italian lovers and such, though as the principals and chorus got chummier in the backstage lounge I caught more than a hint that the diva was lustily hinting availability to one of the more strapping (all right, rotund) male choristers.

At times I wondered at the sacrifice in private life that major musicians make to maintain their performance schedules; the regular chorus members made similar sacrifices for far worse pay. I also recalled with a chuckle hearing, backstage during my first *Aida* production, the Hungarian tenor who sang the chief priest Ramfis mourn to a companion, in sketchy German which he probably thought no one else around him understood: "I am here a month now and still I am having no woman."

I encountered a second, much more surprising kind of unreflectivity. Often I would bring up some of the topics

MOONLIGHTING IN *TURANDOT*

I was mulling over from my reading in Puccini's life and work. Certainly everyone around me cared about performance interpretation, and many (though by no means all) had systematic training in music theory. But they were interested little or none in music analysis and deeper interpretation of *Turandot* for their own sake. Much less did I hear talk of abstract aesthetic matters. I was reminded of my college years. Once, after reading too much Nietzsche (tht's easy to do, of course), I asked an artist friend what he thought about the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy. He replied, "Artists don't usually think about those things." Nor, do I suspect, do artists think much of, or about, Danto.

As an opera approached opening night, two important people got almost no recognition, and seemed by temperament not to seek it. In our production it happened that both "performed" before the audience, but in an odd way. A few weeks before, the chorus leader, who had rehearsed us from spotty to pretty good, then had yielded to the conductor, who of course would get major applause from the audience. She took up her other part: directing the off-stage "banda" and the chorus, when it sang offstage. There is not glory in this. The offstage conductor will not be applauded for an excellent performance, but failure to follow the main conductor over the video, and to allow for the time lag caused by the distance between the orchestra pit and the backstage music, will be noticed by everyone, whether performers or even a musically callow audience.

Odder still is the opera rehearsal pianist, a breed apart among other keyboard accompanists, such as those for

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Lieder, since they at least get to appear before an audience. The opera rehearsal pianist's occupation is all work and no glory. He - my three have been all He's, I don't know why - must know the score perfectly and bring out with his two hands the various instrumental roles that are key to the vocal rehearsal. In Turandot it is indeed a wild profusion of instruments. He must quickly thumb to the conductor's indicated place to begin, must have the exact tempo immediately, and must stop on a single beat when the conductor stops. When cast rehearsals with orchestra began, our accompanist left his piano and played keyboard in the pit. The audience never saw him even then. I jested to someone that after rehearsals he must go home, have a few drinks, and sit down to play the whole opera through for himself, the way he likes it. The reply: "I don't think so." When, a few years later, I did ask a Aïda rehearsal pianist whether he did that, he said, no, he went home and played Liszt or Ravel or just improvised - the music he himself loved.

Throughout rehearsals I would ask my fellow choristers about their day jobs. Some were musicians in real life, often not as performers, but rather as teachers of schoolroom music and private lessons, whether they felt called to it or just treated it is the usual fate of people who live to perform music but must pay the rent. When we were tired or had been chidden for our mistakes, I might grin with mock-puzzlement and ask, "So why do you keep doing this?" Occasionally I asked the question quite sincerely. Either way, I always heard the same answer, uttered with joyful earnestness: "Because I love it." ♪