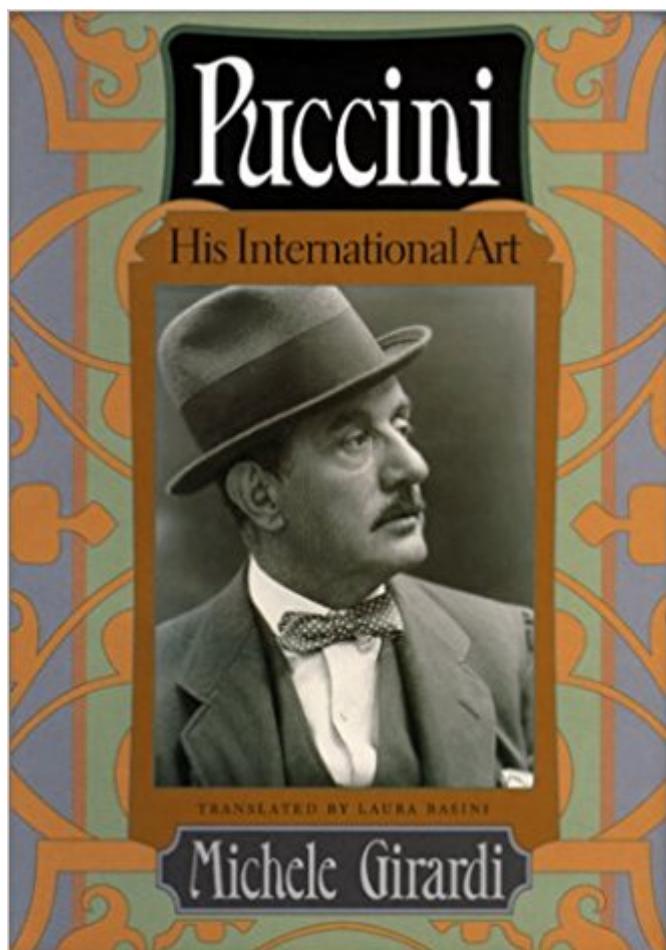


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Puccini: His International Art



Synopsis

Puccini's operas are among the most popular and widely performed in the world, yet few books have examined his body of work from an analytical perspective. This volume remedies that lack in lively prose accessible to scholars and opera enthusiasts alike.

Book Information

Hardcover: 546 pages

Publisher: University of Chicago Press; 1 edition (August 15, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0226297578

ISBN-13: 978-0226297576

Product Dimensions: 6.8 x 1.4 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #2,729,031 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #86 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Composers > Puccini #3442 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Instruments > Voice #4505 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Forms & Genres > Opera

Customer Reviews

As often happens with works of great popular appeal, the operas of Puccini are less likely to receive scholarly consideration than those, say, of Richard Wagner. Girardi (musicology and the history of contemporary music, Univ. of Pavia, Italy) puts Puccini in perspective as a master composer, emphasizing the often-complex symphonic nature of his writing. The operas are treated chronologically and analyzed in great detail. Along with 196 musical examples, there are extensive quotations from Puccini's correspondence, excerpts from reviews (and the composer's reactions to them), and discussion of the original casts. A clear and immediate picture emerges of Puccini's musical development and of the creative process, with thorough documentation of the composer's involvement in all aspects of production and his relationships with librettists, publishers, conductors, and singers. Of special interest is a detailed account of the controversy surrounding the completion of *Turandot* (after Puccini's death) by fellow composer Franco Alfano. The writing, even in translation, is always precise and engaging, although the painstaking musical analysis may limit its appeal for the general reader. Some may find Girardi's theories concerning Puccini's use of leitmotifs a stretch, but this important work fills a gap in opera scholarship and is an essential

purchase for large music collections."Kate McCaffrey, Onondaga Cty. P.L., Syracuse, NY Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"A serious, long-overdue analysis of all of Puccini's great operas, filled with fascinating detail." - Reed Woodhouse, Boston Book Review "Girardi takes us through the operas, act by act, showing us how cleverly they're put together, and how thoroughly they are conversant not just with Wagner but also Berg, Schoenberg, Mahler, Stravinsky, Strauss, Debussy and others.... We also get a sampling of Puccini's correspondence, and the discreetest possible hint of the amorous embarrassments that he was forever getting involved in." - Jerry Fodor, London Review of Books "The most comprehensive Puccini study to date.... A major accomplishment, this book adds new dimensions to Puccini research and formal criticism." - Choice "It is high time for a biography worthy of Puccini, and that is what Michele Girardi has given us.... This is likely to remain definitive for a long time." - Richard Freed, Washington Post Book World

Michele Girardi's much-honored Italian work is now available in a graceful English translation. This book is more dense, musically speaking, than most opera studies, but it is an extremely refreshing account nonetheless. Girardi's deep understanding of opera history, the Italian music and publishing industry, the various sources for Puccini's operas, and, most important, Puccini's musical fingerprints has produced an essential handbook for singers, instrumentalists, Puccini admirers, and opera fans generally. The emphasis here is on Puccini's musical cosmopolitanism, beginning with his early introduction to Wagner's music, especially "Parsifal." Throughout his life, Puccini had great respect for and curiosity about his contemporaries in the opera world, and Girardi has assembled a wealth of persuasive musical evidence confirming that curiosity. Also, Girardi convincingly shows that, from the start, Puccini's promise was great and fully recognized by the most sophisticated publishers and composers. In particular, his account of the creation of Puccini's first opera, "Le villi," together with a fresh look at the Sonzogno competition in which Puccini entered its score, shows that Giulio Ricordi, Verdi's publisher, knew from the start that Puccini might represent a gold mine for his firm and therefore lavished attention and favors on the 25-year-old musical neophyte. Girardi's account helps to dispel the traditional image of the youthful Puccini as lazy, slipshod, and decidedly unpromising, and it shows Giulio Ricordi to be a man of exquisite taste and judgment. Best of all, Girardi shows that much of the pleasure that professionals and amateurs take in Puccini's music is due to the consummate craftsmanship with which Puccini used tiny musical phrases and rhythmic patterns to intensify both his plot and his characters. The chapter on "Boheme," for

example, shows how this habit of using melody and rhythm to foreshadow later events makes the opera's climax almost unbearably moving and dramatically inevitable. Girardi's enthusiasm for "Il trittico," particularly for the much maligned and misunderstood "Suor Angelica," should enable a new generation of stage directors and audiences to appreciate more fully Puccini's musical and dramatic intentions in this brilliant work. It is rewarding to see that, through Girardi's book, Puccini's long-acknowledged genius as a man of the theatre can finally be linked to his unacknowledged genius as a composer without making apologies or allowances. (This review is based on the paperback edition of Girardi's work.)

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