

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
May 25 programme complementary content

Experience some of the most passionate music ever written from one of the greatest opera composers of all time, Giacomo Puccini. Sung by two of opera's most celebrated stars, hear iconic Puccini arias and orchestral intermezzi – from *La Bohème* to *Madame Butterfly*, and *Le Villi* to *Manon Lescaut*.

This is music that expresses the breadth of human emotion, from tragedy to triumph and everything in between, and for Domingo Hindoyan, it's music close to his heart.

Domingo Hindoyan

[Domingo Hindoyan](#) was born in Caracas in 1980 to a violinist father and a lawyer mother. He started his musical career as a violinist in the ground-breaking Venezuelan music education programme El Sistema.

He studied conducting at [Haute Ecole de Musique in Geneva](#), where he gained his masters, and in 2012 was invited to join the Allianz International Conductor's Academy, through which he worked with the London Philharmonic and the Philharmonia Orchestra and with conductors like Esa-Pekka Salonen and Sir Andrew Davis.

He was appointed first assistant conductor to [Daniel Barenboim](#) at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin in 2013 and in 2019, he took up a position as principal guest conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In the same year, he made his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and was appointed as the Orchestra's new Chief Conductor in 2020, taking up this position in September 2021. He has now extended his contract until 2028.

Sonya Yoncheva

Superstar soprano [Sonya Yoncheva](#) returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. The multi award-winning Bulgarian was born in Plovdiv where she studied piano and voice at the National School for Music and Dance. As a teenager, she presented a show about music on Bulgarian television and won several music competitions, one with her brother [Marin Yonchev](#).

Yoncheva studied at the [Conservatoire de musique de Genève](#) and has gone on to forge a career as a much sought-after performer both of opera and in recital work. She has performed at leading venues across the world including the Metropolitan Opera, Milan's Teatro alla Scala, Paris Opera, Staatsoper Berlin, Teatro Real and Royal Opera House, and at the Salzburg Festival.

Among her many awards are Medici.tv Artist of the Year 2017, the Readers Award in the 2019 International Opera Awards, and the 2021 Opus Klassik Singer of the Year.

Recent appearances have included the title role in Cherubini's *Médée* at La Scala, *Madama Butterfly* and *Tosca* at Berlin's Staatsoper Unter den Linden, and a concert marking 50 years of Plácido Domingo in Salzburg. Future engagements include Bellini's *Norma* in Munich and *Tosca* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Riccardo Massi

[Riccardo Massi](#) has earned an international reputation as an exciting Italian spinto tenor, playing the heroes of Puccini and Verdi, and has been heard in opera houses around the world – from the Met in New York to the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Born in Salerno, he perfected his vocal technique under the guidance of David Holst and in 2007 was invited to join the Accademia della Scala.

He made his opera debut in Salerno in 2009 when he played Rameses in *Aida* – later reprising the role at the Metropolitan Opera during his United States debut. Other roles include Mario Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, Calaf in *Turandot*, Don Alvaro in Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* and Enzo in Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*.

Recent appearances include Manrico in *Il trovatore* in Parma, Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* in Buenos Aires, Mario in *Tosca* in Vienna, and Dick Johnson in Puccini's *The Girl of the Golden West* at the Opera de Lyon.

Did you know? Before Riccardo Massi became a professional operatic tenor, he was a successful stuntman and specialist in the handling of ancient and medieval weapons. His screen credits include Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* and HBO's *Rome*.

Watch Riccardo Massi sing [Recondita armonia](#) from *Tosca*.

Giacomo Puccini

While he was born into a family of church musicians in the Tuscan city of Lucca, it was on stage that [Giacomo Puccini](#) would find a home – and become one of the greatest ever composers of opera. He composed [12 works](#) over the course of 40 years, from *Le Villi* in 1884 when he was 26 to *Turandot* which was left unfinished at his death in 1924 (and later completed by fellow Italian Franco Alfano).

Unlike other composers, Puccini looked not to myths, legends or history for many of his plots, but instead to successful plays or novels, including arguably his three most famous works.

Tosca was based [on a play](#) of the same name by prolific French dramatist Victorien Sardou, and was premiered in Paris in 1887 with Sarah Bernhardt in the title role.

Madama Butterfly came from an 1898 short story by American lawyer and writer John Luther Long, who himself had partly based his work on Pierre Loti's semi-autobiographical novel, *Madame Chrysanthème*.

And *La Bohème* took its inspiration from [Henri Murger's](#) 1851 novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (Scenes of Bohemian Life), set in 1840s Paris.

Did you know? Puccini composed in the 'verismo' (Italian for realism) style, which was popular at the tail end of the 19th Century and generally involved melodramatic plots with characters drawn from everyday life. Other composers who used the same style included Mascagni and Giordano.

Enjoy Sonya Yoncheva singing [O Mio Babbino Caro](#) from Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*.

About the Music

A full century has passed since the death of Giacomo Puccini, and his reputation is stronger than ever. Not only does he fill opera houses all over the world, his YouTube views are up in the tens of millions and, thanks partly to its use as a theme tune for the 1990 Italian World Cup, 'Nessun Dorma' ('Let no one sleep') from *Turandot* is the one operatic aria just about everybody knows.

But something else is striking too. For a good deal of the last century, there was no shortage of Puccini sceptics and detractors: self-proclaimed connoisseurs who sneered and tut-tutted over his alleged 'sentimentality', 'sensationalism', 'playing to the gallery' – and more of that sort of thing. And yet now those voices have fallen almost entirely silent. Was their problem really the music? After all Puccini also had some impressive admirers – the great twentieth century musical tragedian Dmitri Shostakovich for instance, and the ferociously intellectual arch-modernist Arnold Schoenberg. Or was it just old-fashioned snobbery – high-minded horror at what the conductor Thomas Beecham (with tongue firmly in cheek) called his 'appalling popularity'?

How easily some people let popularity cloud their vision. Puccini is a master of his craft. Each one of his mature operas is compelling, expertly paced, with dramatic climaxes always at just the right point, and musically they never feel a note overlong. Unlike some opera composers, even one or two big names, Puccini never writes musical 'padding'. To be caught up in the unfolding drama of a Puccini opera can be like being caught in a powerful current – beguilingly slow and apparently gentle at first, perhaps, but before long heading inexorably towards a cliff-edge. And how vividly the characters are drawn! Pinkerton's weakness is as palpable as his desire in *Madam Butterfly*, each one of the students and their friends in *La Boheme* is a real, rounded character, with a musical sound-world of his or her own: the philosopher Colline bidding farewell to his beloved coat is a truly touching moment. All right, the consumptive Mimi might be too sweet for some tastes, but – just in case the charge of traditional operatic misogyny might be lurking in the wings – there's also Tosca, flawed but magnificent; and don't those very flaws make her so much more real? And against her is pitted one of opera's outstanding villains, Scarpia – not a melodrama devil, but a real personification of evil, which Dostoyevsky might have admired.

But the greatest miracle is the way the tune – those wonderful, unforgettable tunes – fit so effortlessly into the drama. In fact 'fit into' suggests something more artificial than the wonders of nature Puccini actually creates. 'Nessun dorma', 'Che gelida manina' ('What a cold little hand') from *La Boheme*, or 'Vissi d'arte' ('I lived for love') from *Tosca* are glories in their own right, but each aria is woven into the musical and psychological tissue of the opera with a skill which even Wagner sometimes struggled to balance. In some Italian operas, particularly the 'bel canto' ('beautiful singing') kind, you might get the impression that the music exists primarily for five-star divas or divos to show off their scintillating vocal skills. That's an element in Puccini, certainly, but what stands out even more is his ability to make us empathise with the characters on stage, even when the libretto itself isn't quite first-rate. It's something he shares with Mozart, or Verdi, or even such twentieth century masters as Leoš Janáček, Alban Berg and Benjamin Britten. At the same time he can send you out of the opera house or concert hall with tunes soaring and ringing in your ears. Surely that's a very special achievement!