

## Italy Puccini Festival small group Tour

### Reading List

#### **Puccini: The Great Composers**

by Michael Steen

Puccini and Verdi are unquestionably the two giants of 19th-century Italian grand opera. Like Verdi, Puccini knew what his audience wanted, and supplied it – in Puccini's case, a highly coloured world of sweeping emotion, melodrama shot through with a kind of sadism. His three greatest operas, *La Bohème* – the most popular opera ever written – *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* are invariably staged every year, while *Turandot*, *La fanciulla del West*, *Manon Lescaut*, and *Gianni Schicchi* appear only scarcely less often.

Ever the hard-drinking, chain-smoking sportsman, Puccini had much of the raffish playboy about him. He bought himself fast cars, yachts named after the works whose proceeds financed them, and built a magnificent house at Torre del Lago where he continued his womanising under the jealous eye of his wife, Elvira. Michael Steen's narrative follows the progress of the small boy stealing the organ pipes of his village church on the rocky road to fame to become this larger-than-life figure.

Supported for several years by his publisher Ricordi, Puccini's first real hit was *Manon Lescaut*, heavily influenced by Massenet. Subsequent success saw him joining the jet set, and travelling to England and America, his star only eclipsed by the First World War. But his appeal remains clear and direct, as the director Jonathan Miller says: 'I'm made to cry by Puccini and I never am by Verdi.'

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#### **Plot Synopses of Puccini's Operas: *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madame Butterfly***

Originally published in 1916 as portions of the author's larger "The Opera Book," this Kindle edition, equivalent in length to a physical book of approximately 16 pages, summarizes the plots of Puccini's most famous operas: "*La Bohème*," "*Tosca*," and "*Madame Butterfly*." Includes a brief sketch of Puccini's life.

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#### **Puccini: His Life & Music**

by Julian Haylock

Puccini is one of the most beloved of all opera composers – La Bohème, Tosca, Madama Butterfly and Turandot play to packed opera houses the world over. In his lifetime he achieved an international celebrity accorded to only a few, yet the critics were rarely impressed. He was nevertheless a creative artist of profound sensitivity and dramatic flair who developed a unique form of free-flowing opera while penning some of the greatest melodies of all time. His oeuvre constitutes the final flowering of the centuries-old tradition of Italian opera while also being an influence on cinema music then in its infancy. This music companion provides a compelling overview of the constant tension created between Puccini's indulgent, sometimes traumatic personal life and his need to achieve exceptionally high standards in its work.

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### **Puccini Among Friends**

by Vincent Seligman

Puccini was an Italian, a musician, highly strung, temperamental, diffident and easily discouraged, changing quickly from exaltation to despair.

Nearly all of Puccini's biographers remark on his distaste for writing letters, nevertheless when my mother died nearly two years ago I found amongst her papers more than seven hundred letters from him, all written during the last twenty years of his life. From these I have selected, in whole or in part, some three hundred letters to form the basis of this memoir. In no sense of the word can it be considered a formal biography, but rather a portrait, largely self-drawn, of a very lovable character, and the record of a singularly beautiful friendship.

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### **The Complete Puccini: The Story of the World's Most Popular Operatic Composer**

by Colin Kendall

La Bohème, Tosca, Turandot, Madama Butterfly - Puccini's operas are among the most frequently performed in the standard repertoire. 'Nessun dorma' and other Puccini arias have achieved great levels of fame and recognition. Puccini was a contradictory character - apparently cavalier in his approach to life, with his many affairs with women, but also subject to feelings of great depression. Kendall explores Puccini through his music - confident at first when he emerged as a promising young talent, cautious and uncertain after the failure of his second opera had endangered his career, gradually more assured as he became established as a leading musical figure, then, at the end, anxious to complete his final work before it was too late. Kendall tells the story of the world's most popular operatic composer, progressing through the operas, their plots and how they were composed. He recounts it all in a simple way with explanations of operatic terms so that no expert

knowledge is required.

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## **Puccini's Operas For Beginners**

by Gianni Truvianni

The opera's of Puccini described for those who are considering becoming opera fans.

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