

# Puccini's 'Turandot' opens season in East Bay

By EMAN ISADIAR and GEORGE HERNANDEZ

WALNUT CREEK, California—The Festival Opera of Walnut Creek opened its 2009 season at the Leshar Center for the Arts with a strong, colorful, and inspiring production of Puccini's final opera "Turandot," which continued through July 19.

The principal roles of Turandot, Calaf, and Liù were sung by soprano Othalia Graham, tenor Christopher Jackson, and soprano Rebecca Sjöwall respectively, with Bryan Nies conducting the orchestra.

Much like its spice-laced tale of the royal courts of the Far East, the creation of the opera itself was fraught with drama and controversy.

Composer Giacomo Puccini had composed roughly three-quarters of the music when he was diagnosed with advanced throat cancer and died shortly thereafter. Knowing of his impending death, Puccini asked that his colleague Riccardo Zandonai finish the opera.

The composer's dying wish, however, was ignored by his editor and by his own family, who instead commissioned Franco Alfano to write the remaining music. This choice, arguably, left a conspicuous artistic scar in the final act of the opera.

The 1926 world premiere of "Turandot" was led by the legendary Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini, who refused to include Alfano's ending, and ordered the curtain lowered in the middle of Act 3 with the sounding of the final notes known to have been written by Puccini himself.

The story is taken from the Persian tale of "Turandokht" ("Damsel of the Orient"), which in translation becomes "Turandot." It is the name of an irresistible Chinese princess, whose beauty is matched only by her

cruelty and contempt toward men. According to custom, she must marry, but her intense hatred for men causes her to devise a sordid plan to eliminate her suitors.

Any man requesting Turandot's hand in marriage must offer the correct answer to each of three mind-boggling riddles. A wrong answer, however, does not simply mean refusal of the marriage proposal—it means death by execution.

In the opening act, the prince of Persia is slated for execution at dawn for failing to answer Turandot's riddles. Now the deposed prince of Tartary, Calaf, who is traveling incognito, falls victim to Turandot's charms and sounds the ceremonial gong, thereby presenting himself as her next suitor. He becomes aware that his father, the former Tartar king Timur, is also wandering the streets of Peking with his loyal maid, Liù.

Unbeknownst to all until now, Liù has been secretly in love with Calaf for years, which explains why she has remained in his father's service. After being reunited and hearing of Calaf's intent to marry Turandot, the former king and his maid plead with Calaf not to risk his life for the princess, who has so far managed to have all of her suitors killed.

But Calaf persists and remains true to his heart. He answers all of the riddles with awe-inspiring wisdom. However, knowing that he has yet to earn Turandot's love, he offers to be executed, but only if the princess is able to find out his name by morning.

This is when the frenzy begins. Turandot charges everyone serving the royal court with the single task of uncovering her mysterious suitor's identity, or else all shall be killed.

Singing the part of Calaf, lyric tenor Christopher Jackson gave a remarkably sincere rendition of "Nessun dorma" ("None



ACT 3: The closing scene of Turandot when Calaf has won the heart of the icy queen, Turandot. ROBERT SHOMLER

Shall Sleep"), which has become perhaps one of the most famous arias of all time. It describes the long night during which Calaf's life hangs in the balance as Turandot's subjects seek to reveal the Tartar prince's name.

Against the odds, love prevails at last and Calaf melts through the ice of Turandot's distrust, winning her affection with a tender kiss.

Appearing as the heartless Turandot, Othalia Graham brought much dramatic depth to a largely one-dimensional character. Graham's subtlety of acting and her powerful voice are two reasons behind the success of this production.

Rebecca Sjöwall gave a moving performance as the love-stricken Liù, the im-

port of whose character is often raised above that of Turandot. Sjöwall reached her highest point in the aria "Signore, ascolta" ("Listen Master") where she begs Calaf not to attempt to solve Turandot's riddles, to which Jackson replies with an equally compelling "Non piangere più" ("No More Tears").

Sadly, Liù gives her life while refusing to divulge Calaf's name to Turandot.

Baritone Igor Vieira and tenors Adam Flowers and Michael Mendelssohn brought just the right touch of comic relief as high-ranking officials Ping, Pang, and Pong, doubling as court jesters. An invisible star of the show was James Toland, under whose direction the chorus came to life as the men, women, and children of

this exotic metropolis on the Silk Road.

Festival Opera's "Turandot" was a highly professional production with striking sets and lighting that magically transformed every corner of the fairly small stage into the ancient land of legend.

While talent was in no short supply, the twin heroes of this production were stage director David Cox, for raising the acting of the cast to a level worthy of their voices, and conductor Bryan Nies, for his attentive and flawless orchestral accompaniment.

George Hernández teaches voice and piano in Walnut Creek. Eman Isadiar teaches piano at the Peninsula Conservatory and writes about music in the San Francisco Bay Area.

# Olympic venues to showcase Aboriginal art

By RYAN MOFFATT  
Epoch Times Staff

The rich cultures and traditions of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, depicted through works of art, will be showcased when the world visits Vancouver for the 2010 Olympic Games.

As part of the 2010 Aboriginal Arts program, each of the 15 Olympic and Paralympic venues will incorporate works by Canada's diverse Aboriginal artists.

The \$2 million program incorporates over 140 pieces of art from 90 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis artists, adding a uniquely Canadian element

to the Games. The artists hail from every province and territory, with 35 from B.C.

The program will produce a first of its kind collection of art from established artists as well as up and coming talent, leaving a legacy of artwork and serving as a testament to the artistic talent of Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

Forty of the pieces, which in some cases are seamlessly integrated into the structure of the venue itself, will become permanent fixtures at the venues.

The works are in both traditional and contemporary styles and use a wide variety of mediums includ-

ing textiles, copper, steel, concrete, yellow cedar, glass and caribou tufting.

The program incorporates an educational and cultural element by pairing established artists with at-risk youth from across Canada to create three original sculptures for the Games.

One of those participating in the program is Haida artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas whose work will be showcased at UBC's Thunderbird winter sports arena.

"I was contacted by an agent of the program and asked if I would participate in exposing urban youth to some of the intricacies of produc-

ing contemporary Art," Yahgulanaas said.

The inventor of a new genre of graphic narrative called Haida manga, Yahgulanaas uses Haida narratives and transforms them into contemporary and socially relevant art.

His venue piece "Take-Off" is a copper bird figure sitting six meters above the entrance to UBC's Thunderbird winter sports arena. The surface of the bird is tattooed with a Haida manga image of a speeding hockey player with stick in hand. The bird is meant to reflect the spirit of the dove which is integral to the Olympics' message

of peace, and the hockey player is a representation of sport as a peaceful event.

Also involved with the Aboriginal Art Program is the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA), UNYA addresses issues that negatively affect the lives of youth through prevention-based activities such as tutoring, peer leadership, employment, culture, residential programs, and sports and recreation activities.

"The Urban Native Youth Association is so competently organized and responsibly run as to be almost unique," said Yahgulanaas. "The care of physical infrastructure and organizational maturity is something to be commended. It makes Canadians look very good."

Aboriginal art is currently flourishing—it has survived and thrived

despite the challenges faced by Canada's Indigenous peoples.

"Specifically for Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian experience, the production of art remains one of the few areas where culture has not been fully assaulted by foreign interventions," said Yahgulanaas.

The 2010 Aboriginal Arts program is sponsored by the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games along with the The Four Host Nations Society, a non-profit organization that has been established by the Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

Sixteen Four Host First Nations works will have pride of place in areas such as entrances and gateways at venues like Pacific Coliseum and the Olympic and Paralympic Villages in Whistler and Vancouver.

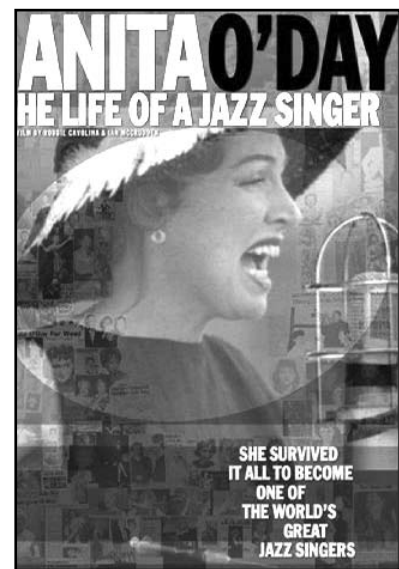
# DVD review: 'Anita O'Day: The Life of a Jazz Singer'

By JOE BENDEL  
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She offers no excuses or apologies for living a dramatic, sometimes even lurid life. Anita O'Day is an acknowledged member of the Jazz Pantheon, whom many consider the equal of legendary vocalists like Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday. She was also a longtime heroin addict who had a knack for getting involved with the wrong men. Hers was truly a jazz life, which is documented with appropriate verve in Robbie Cavolina and Ian McCrudden's "Anita O'Day: The Life of a Jazz Singer" now available on DVD.

O'Day's first real national exposure came with Gene Krupa's band, where she raised eyebrows by playfully interacting onstage with the African-American trumpeter Roy Eldridge. Then following a brief stint with Woody Herman, she reluctantly signed on with Stan Kenton's outfit, where she tried valiantly to get him to swing more, as she explains in a hilarious segment. Despite Kenton's terminally white bread style, O'Day was able to make silk purses out of his novelty numbers like "And Her Tears Flowed Like Wine," before striking out on her own.

Unfortunately, O'Day's life is nearly synonymous with chaos, with her addictions all too public, yet she kept plugging away at the jazz life. She was commencing another comeback shortly before her death, with



the help of her final manager, co-director Cavolina.

We do hear various interviewers ask the requisite questions about drugs and other madness, which she answers honestly and directly. However, true to the jazz ethos, she appears more interested in the present than the dead past. Likewise, Cavolina and McCrudden seem more concerned with O'Day's music than the details of her habit. Refreshingly, their interview subjects include many musicians and arrangers like Joe Wilder, Dr. Billy Taylor, Russ Garcia, and Annie Ross, whose reminiscences will certainly interest jazz listeners beyond O'Day's consid-

erable diehard fans.

Happily, O'Day emerges as the film's best sound bite, displaying real charisma and a hipster sense humor even at an advanced age. If nothing else, Cavolina and McCrudden prove she was one cool canary. They also present her music well, including many vintage O'Day performances, many of which are included in their entirety in the bonus section. Also among the substantial extras are interview outtakes featuring O'Day's reflections on many of her classic verve albums that will fascinate her serious fans.

Despite the many talking heads, "Jazz Singer" moves along at vigorous pace. It is a well put together film, featuring stylish graphics clearly inspired by O'Day's groovy verve album covers. O'Day fans will be happy to find Cavolina & McCrudden's approach to their subject and the ultimate execution to do right by the jazz great. While they never duck the tough realities of O'Day's jazz life, they keep the focus squarely where it belongs—on her music. The standard 2-DVD set of Jazz Singer releases this week, to be followed by a deluxe edition bound with a special 160 page hardcover book on September 1st.

Joe Bendel blogs on jazz and cultural issues at www.jbspins.blogspot.com and coordinated the Jazz Foundation of America's instrument-donation campaign for musicians displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

# Exploring Chinese characters: explaining 瓦

By CHANG FUCHANG  
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The character 瓦 (wa) means tile, the ceramic pieces used for covering roofs. A tiled roof is a major characteristic of traditional Chinese architecture. According to historical records, in the Xia Dynasty, about 4000 years ago, Chinese people were already producing tiles. Archeologists have unearthed tiles produced in the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 B.C.-771 B.C.).

The character 瓦 was not found in Oracle Bone Inscriptions (Jia Gu Wen) or Bronze Inscriptions (Jin Wen), which suggests the possibility that tiles were not generally used until the Zhou Dynasty. The earliest appearance of the character 瓦 is found in the Seal Script (Zhuanshu), in which it resembles a piece of tile.

As tiles are laid in overlapping rows, damage to a few individual pieces can cause the collapse of a large area, or even the entire roof. So the Chinese word 瓦解 (wa jie), literally translated as "tile disintegrate," is used to describe complete disintegration.

Tile manufacturing was well developed in ancient China. Tiles were made into various artistic forms and painted with colorful glazes, and became a lively part of Chinese architecture.

瓦 can also refer to earthenware, ceramics or pottery, such as 瓦盆, earthenware pot. Ceramics or porcelain is called 瓷

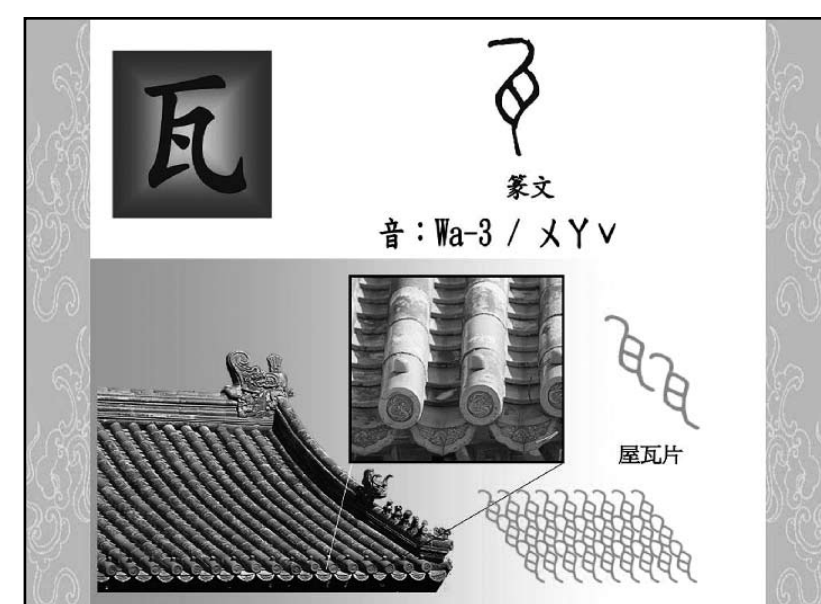
(ci) in Chinese. Ceramic production originated in China, where it flourished into a brilliant art form cherished for centuries by people all around the world. It was so pre-eminent in the Western world that China the country was named after it.

## EXPLAINING 瓷: COMBINING SYMBOLS 瓦 AND 次

In the character 瓷 (simplified form of 瓷), the 次 (ci) on top indicates the pronunciation, while the 瓦 indicates its meaning. Another form

of 瓷 is 珐, which is formed by 玉, jade, and 瓦, earthenware. While the form of 瓷 reflects pronunciation of the word, 珐 is associated with visual effect, implying "earthenware that looks like jade." This combination is a perfect depiction of the fine, smooth glazing and opaque texture of ceramics. However, the character 珐 is no longer in use in modern Chinese.

The character 次 is a common character in Chinese. A later article will give a detailed introduction to this character



The character wa represents the tiles used to make roofs. The symbol has a variety of functions in the network of Chinese characters. THE EPOCH TIMES