

The Puccini Festival

A Different Way of Viewing Opera



Whenever I tell people that I sing opera they look aghast. That I am a roughly 100-pound opera singer seems to confuse people greatly and yet, here we are. One of my greatest pleasures is to amalgamate my tastes for travel and music by visiting destinations punctuated by operatic indulgence. That is how I first happened upon the Puccini Festival.

Situated in Torre del Lago, Italy, this operatic festival occurs every summer and has done so since 1930. It is the product of the (very) late Giacomo Puccini's desire to one day see his operas performed in the setting that inspired him as a composer. This wish, expressed to a friend, motivated the postmortem conception of the festival, overlooking Lake Massaciuccoli, where Puccini spent time and composed.

On program evenings, patrons of the festival watch the sun disappear over the lake as the opera begins. This spectacular prologue to a night of world-class opera is worth the trip itself. Soon, the singers appear on the alfresco stage and the performance is underway. Experiencing Puccini's libretti

with the understanding of the history behind the venue is truly magnetic. The balmy air and lakeside situation present a unique way of consuming opera. Gone are the stiff velvet curtains, the updos and ball gowns. Less about being seen than the experience itself, the festival attracts true musical fans from all over, many of whom wear jeans or other casual attire. Between acts, cranes remove and replace large bits of scenery, a process that is not hidden behind fabric, but rather visible to the 3,400 seats.

This year's Puccini Festival will be held between July 25th and August 30th and will feature performances of *Madame Butterfly*, *Turandot*, *La Bohème* and the lesser-known *Il Trittico*. Tickets can be purchased online at www.puccinifestival.it, in person or via telephone. If you do attend the festival, my personal suggestion is to stay in neighboring town, Lucca, which is both picturesque and historical, as it is where Puccini was born and raised. Spend an afternoon biking around the city walls and travel to Torre del Lago by car just before the sun sets; that way, you're sure to experience the spectacular setting in all its beauty. ■

— REBA WILSON

Twitter: @Reba_Wilson