

Frost Zone Zine

# The Complete Turandot

The Complete *Turandot*

Matias Travieso-Diaz



*La tua anima è in alto!  
Ma il tuo corpo è vicino.  
Con le mani brucianti stringerò  
i lembi d'oro del tuo manto stellato  
La mia bocca fremente  
premerò su di te...*

Giacomo Puccini, *Turandot*, Act III


I

t all started with my love for music. My parents had season tickets to the Met and we attended several performances each year.

Puccini's *Turandot* was a particular favorite of mine. Yet, the last few minutes of the opera always left me unsatisfied: Puccini had died leaving the last two scenes unwritten. The opera was completed by someone who used melodies from earlier parts of the work to finish the score. While this proved an adequate solution, the love duet at the end of the opera lacked the soaring melodies that Puccini was capable of generating.

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My parents tried to steer me towards a career in science or technology, but my mind reveled in the fantasies that composers created. The struggle ended when it was discovered that I had considerable musical aptitude. I enrolled in a conservatory and became a professional pianist and, later, the main conductor of a midwestern opera company. By the age of forty-five, I was moderately successful but wasn't blazing any trails.



I needed a project that could bring me worldwide recognition. And then I recalled the finale of *Turandot*. What if I could find the missing music? If I could perform for the first time *the complete* *Turandot*, fame would surely follow.

Then, another thought occurred to me: if I could somehow communicate with the dead Puccini, I might retrieve the music that never saw the light of day.

But communicating with a dead person involves seeking the assistance of a medium or engaging in necromancy. I discarded mediums as charlatans. Necromancy, however, was once considered a reputable science whose practitioners could bring back the "shadows" of the dead. Alas, necromancy had been extinguished for centuries.

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After much investigating, I heard, in a chat room where a bogus form of necromancy was being discussed in a role-playing game, of the existence of a real, living necromancer. The person who provided the tip explained that she used to live in Bucharest as a student and once visited a village known as Corabia. There, at the local inn, she overheard a conversation concerning a Mrs. Draganu, who could summon the dead and speak to them. Several people in the village confirmed the reputation of the lady in question as adept in communicating with deceased people.

I sent a letter to Mrs. Draganu in an envelope addressed to the Corabia postmaster, with a note that solicited his help in locating her. Several weeks went by. I then received a letter in French from Corabia. In it, Mrs. Draganu stated that yes, she was a necromancer who had learned the art from her grandmother and now used it to communicate with her deceased husband. She was willing to take me as a pupil, but I would have to travel to Corabia and lodge with her. She suggested that I come in the summer.



I am a bachelor and have no commitments during the summer, since the opera is idle. I immediately responded to her and set our meeting for the upcoming summer.

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After a summer of intensive training, I learned the “Death Speak” spell, which allows the caster to have a single, brief conversation with a deceased person. It is fairly straightforward but requires the necromancer to be in physical contact with the body of the deceased. Thus, I needed to travel to Italy and visit Puccini’s tomb.

Puccini’s corpse lays in a mausoleum inside the villa where he used to live. The villa is open for tours, which include the mausoleum itself.

I studied tour brochures and discovered that, in winter, tours are held only Thursdays through Saturdays. Armed with that information, I arranged to leave for Italy on a Friday in December. I intended to carry out my task over the weekend and return home immediately, in time for the Christmas holidays.

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I arrived on a Saturday morning and drove to the vicinity of Villa Puccini, where I had reserved a room at a local hotel. That evening, right after sunset, I walked over to the villa.

A late autumn storm raged. It was thundering and a cold rain was falling: I got drenched and nearly froze during the short walk. I opened the gate carefully, making no noise, and headed in the darkness towards the mausoleum, located in gardens adjacent to the main building. Because of the rain, the darkness, and the location of the mausoleum, there was little chance that the caretakers would see me.



Puccini's casket lay on a pedestal in the center of the building. The casket's lid had been secured by turning a sealing key, but I had purchased such a key. Turning my key in a hole at the foot of the coffin, I was able to unlock the lid, lift it, and lower it carefully to the floor.

I had with me the necromancy reagents, a lamb bone and a vial of my own blood, enclosed in a bag. I intoned the Death Speak incantation, which transformed the reagents into a talisman that allowed me to have a conversation with the deceased.

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The air filled with a nauseating stench as the remains of Puccini became exposed. The cadaver's skeleton was covered by a thin layer of repulsive yellowish material. I had to be in physical contact with the corpse for the duration of the spell;

however, laying a hand on the corruption that covered the corpse elicited an almost unbearable revulsion, and I was only able to avoid vomiting through the exercise of my will.

I had rehearsed the question I would ask, and now posed it while holding the bag with the talisman above the corpse: “Puccini, at the time of your death you were composing the ending of your last opera, *Turandot*, but were unable to commit the music to paper. Sing for me the final love duet between Calaf and the Princess.”

There was a silence, underscored by the pelting of the rain against the walls of the mausoleum. Then sound shards responded to my request with a harsh rejoinder:

“Who dares disturb a resting soul to ask such a question?”

I was terrified by the challenge, yet managed to frame an insincere reply:

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“The entire world wants to know. With that duet, *Turandot* would be the greatest opera ever written.”

An even angrier response awaited me:

“I don’t want to sing to you and you can’t make me.”

Since appealing to Puccini’s vanity had failed to carry the day, I resorted to brute force. I placed the bag with the talisman on the cadaver’s midriff, which started smoking. Then I shouted at the top of my voice:

“Giacomo Puccini, I command you to sing that duet for me!!”

A growl surged from deep within the corpse. Then, a distorted but recognizable melody began to resonate. I extracted from my coat a wad of music paper and a fountain pen, and hurriedly caught the musical phrases.

After five minutes, the otherworldly voice stopped and I looked at what I had transcribed. It was a magnificent set of counterpointing melodies not previously heard in the opera. I pressed the sheaves of paper to my chest and exhaled in relief.

I let go of the corpse and got to my feet. A sudden light then illuminated the scene, followed by the sound of cracking whips. Seconds later, there was a brutal crash as something shook the mausoleum.

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I didn't know what had happened, but ran to the door, turned the handle, and tried to swing it out. The door didn't budge.

I tried pushing the door with my hand, my shoulder, my entire body. The door didn't move. Something heavy was resisting my efforts. I kept hitting the door with all I had, to no effect.



It was Saturday night. Nobody would come this way for hours or days. There might be no rescue for quite a while.

The air in the mausoleum was already feeling thick, and turned frigid as the outside temperature dropped. I felt I was simultaneously freezing and asphyxiating.

I sat, pressing against a door that wouldn't move, my breaths getting shorter as I panicked. I seemed to hear distant mocking words. Had Puccini engineered my entrapment?

My heart raced and I felt a sharp stab of pain in my chest. I became faint and passed out.

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They found me later, after the caretaker saw the trunk of a large tree pressed against the mausoleum's door. I was alive, barely breathing. I had suffered a massive stroke.

They brought me to a hospital and treated me. I survived but was left paralyzed. I can't speak.

Looking in my pockets they found a wad of wet papers, with ink smeared all over the pages. They threw them away.

I am thus in sole possession of the music I stole. I play it over and over in my mind, both in awe of its beauty and in despair at the heavy cost I incurred in retrieving it.



**Matias Travieso-Diaz** was born in Cuba and migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. He retired and turned his attention to creative writing. His stories have been published or accepted for publication in fifty paying short story anthologies, magazines, audiobooks, and podcasts, most recently the *Grantville Gazette*, *After Dinner Conversation*, *Red Room Press* (YEAR'S BEST HARDCORE HORROR VOL. 6), and *The Copperfield Review*.

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