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## WEIßWURST VS SALAMI: PUCCINI AND STRAUSS

### Chronicle of a fruitful rivalry<sup>1</sup>

Only recently have we recognized Puccini's revealing allusion that contributes to the metatheatrical nature of his *La rondine*. The poet Prunier, the animating spirit of Magda de Civry's salon, rattles off a list of perverse and desirable women that would attract him, a list that begins with "Galatea" and ends with

Prunier

Sa - lo - m!

english horn

bassoon

To be sure, the quotation is ironic.<sup>2</sup> Prunier is an obvious caricature of Gabriele d'Annunzio, who, fishing for money and prestige, had unsuccessfully offered his services to both Puccini and Strauss.<sup>3</sup> But it is more than that: by quoting the theme most tied to Salome's macabre erotic interest in Jochanaan, from their first encounter to the obsessive conclusion, Puccini paid homage to his favorite Strauss opera. Understood as part of the metatheatrical game, this gesture can be interpreted as a con-

<sup>1</sup> Translation from Italian by David Rosen.

<sup>2</sup> The example from *La rondine* is cited from the revised edition of 1945 (Casa musicale Sonzogno, Pl. no. 2022; Universal Edition 9653 E), orchestral score, Act I, 10 bars after figure 35. For the *Salome* example, see 1 after 98 in the score of *Salome*. Berlin: Furstner, 1905; rpt. New York: Dover, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> "D'Annunzio recently let me know by way of Sonzogno that he would gladly write something for me, and he asked me what type of material I would prefer. [...] I don't harbor great hopes in him, but one needs to explore all avenues possible." ("d'Annunzio ließ neulich durch Sonzogno mir mitteilen, daß er gern für mich was arbeiten möchte und frug an, welche Art des Stoffes ich bevorzugen würde. [...] Ich habe nicht allzu viel Hoffnung auf ihn, aber man muß alle Stränge ziehen.") Strauss to Hofmannsthal, 15 May 1911, in: Franz and Alice Strauss (ed.): *Richard Strauss – Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Briefwechsel: Gesamtausgabe*, revised by Willi Schuh. Zürich: Atlantis 1952, p. 109f. On the relations between Puccini and d'Annunzio, see Michele Girardi: *Puccini: His International Art*, trans. Laura Basini. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2002, p. 200f., 259f., 274f., 331f. and passim.





scious farewell to the dramatic theme that had won him universal success: love understood as a sin expiated with the death of his heroines. In the same way, Strauss embarked on a new path after *Elektra*, both in his choice of subjects and in their treatment.

Strauss's name, powerfully forcing itself upon the world with the première of *Salome* in Dresden on 9 December 1905, appears often in Puccini's correspondence. The many little jabs that Puccini gives him are just as understandable as Strauss's prevailing silence about Puccini, especially given that their rivalry on the world's stages was for a long time the manifestation of the vitality of their respective theaters. The Bavarian composer's orchestral music, however, had attracted Puccini's attention much earlier. After having heard Strauss direct *Don Quixote* and *Ein Heldenleben* in Brussels in October 1900, Puccini sent his compliments to the composer in a brief note in French, declaring himself "charmé et rempli d'admiration".<sup>4</sup> That year began with *Tosca* and the violent emergence on the lyric stage of the first character driven by a pathological sadism, a character who justifies himself with the words, "Ha più forte sapore la conquista violenta che il mellifluo consenso". Baron Scarpia's pathology cannot be categorized as ordinary operatic madness; it makes him into a monster who infects the action and rapidly spreads his disease all over European theatre, tempting other composers to treat the reality of psychosis pushed to the point of obsession, as Janáček did with Kostelnička in *Jenůfa* (1904). If the monstrum Salome grasps control of the opera starting with the first three measures, a sudden flicker exposing the first of her themes, Puccini likewise projects the evil hovering over the plot by using three measures and three chords over a whole-tone collection in the bass to emphasise the predictable interval of a triton. But are such similarities only a coincidence?

"The public, not the critics, make our successes," wrote Hofmannsthal in 1911,<sup>5</sup> a motto shared by both composers who had unbounded faith in the working of the operatic marketplace, while aiming to dominate it. Puccini, well established on the world's stages, could not help but feel interest in and affinity for *Salome*. He attended the Austrian première at Graz on 16 May 1906, his curiosity piqued by the fame of the new work. "The Italian composer Puccini also came especially from Pest [just to see it]", Strauss wrote to his wife Pauline with justifiable pride, boasting of Puccini's presence immediately after having mentioned Mahler's.<sup>6</sup> On the following day Puccini mentioned Strauss for the first time in his correspondence. To the Hungarian musi-

<sup>4</sup> Puccini to Strauss, 21 October 1900, in Franz Grasberger (ed.): *Der Strom der Töne trug mich fort: Die Welt um Richard Strauss in Briefen*. Tutzing: Schneider, 1967, p. 134. The letter has recently been published in facsimile in Giangiorgio Satragini: *Richard Strauss und Italien. Die Ausstellung 8*, ed. Christian Wolf. Garmisch-Partenkirchen: Richard-Strauss-Institut 2008, p. 20. The program of Strauss's concert appears in Erik Baeck: *Richard Strauss in Brussels*, in: *Revue belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap* 55 (2001), p. 303-318: 312.

<sup>5</sup> "unsere Erfolge macht das Publikum, nicht die Kritik". Hofmannsthal to Strauss, 23 July 1911, footnote 3, p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> "der italienische Componist Puccini war eigens auch aus Pest gekommen". Strauss to his wife Pauline, 17 May 1906, in Grasberger, see footnote 4, p. 169. An indispensable source for detailed information about Puccini's travels is the "Chronological list of Puccini's sojourns, travels and visits to theatres", in Dieter Schickling: *Puccini. Catalogue of the Works*. Kassel: Bärenreiter 2003, p. 425-453.





cian Ervin Lendvai he noted: “*Salome* is the most extraordinarily, terribly cacophonous thing. There are some beautiful musical effects, but in the end it’s very tiring. Extremely interesting spectacle, though.”<sup>7</sup> These words are testimony to Puccini’s attention to the score and his close attention to the visual aspect – as well as to his taste for witty comments. As she relates in her memoirs, Gemma Bellincioni told Strauss at Graz of her desire to perform the title role. Along with the first Santuzza and the first Fedora (together with the then-unknown Caruso) Bellincioni, though near retirement, took an important role in the introduction of Strauss’s operas in Italy. She sang *Salome* at the Italian première in Turin on 23 December 1906 under the composer’s direction. Only three days later, Arturo Toscanini conducted the opera at La Scala on with Salomea Krusceniski, who had sung *Butterfly* in the May 1904 revival at Brescia. On 6 April 1909, Krusceniski would perform the title role in the Italian première of *Elektra* at La Scala, just three months after the world première. According to Strauss, she was “a first-class *Elektra* in every respect”.<sup>8</sup>

There then began a fluid exchange between performers who moved from Puccini into the Strauss repertoire, and vice versa. For example, Emmy Destinn, who sang *Butterfly* in London (1905), later performed *Salome* in Berlin (1906) and Paris (the 1907 première of the French version) before singing *Minnie* in the first *Fanciulla del West* in New York (1910). A similar case is Claudia Muzio, who sang *Giorgetta* (*Il tabarro*) in the world première of *Il trittico* (New York, 1918), and later portrayed the role of *Marschallin* in Rio de Janeiro (1920) praised by Strauss as “noble and attractive in the highest degree”.<sup>9</sup> And none other than Maria Jeritza, highly acclaimed in Vienna as *Minnie*, *Tosca*, *Giorgetta*, and *Manon* from 1913 to 1922, was the prima donna in the world premières of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Stuttgart, 1912 and Vienna, 1916) and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (Vienna, 1919); in the latter she sang the *Empress*, a part which foreshadows *Turandot*, her bravura role from 1926 on. *Selma Kurz* had already played *Butterfly* at the Viennese première of 1907; she turned to *Zerbinetta* in the revised version of *Ariadne* (1916) and returned to Puccini’s *Geisha* in 1923. Finally, there was *Lotte Lehmann*, who sang all three leading female roles in *Rosenkavalier*, the composer in the second version of *Ariadne*, the first dyer’s wife in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, and, in the 1920s, *Christine* in *Intermezzo*. Not only did Lehmann create a stupendous *Suor Angelica*, but also a *Mimi*, *Tosca*, and *Cio-Cio-San*. “I’ve never heard anything like her *Manon* in Act 4”, Puccini commented after having heard her in that role in 1923.<sup>10</sup> Lehmann also was *Princess Turandot* at the Viennese première with *Schalk* in 1926 and with *Bruno Walter* in the following years. As for conductors, if Strauss resisted Puccini’s music, that was certainly not the case with *Schalk*, the co-director of the Vienna opera. And in those years in Italy, besides *Toscanini*, there was *Tullio Serafin*, who offered a noteworthy interpretation of *Rosenkavalier* in its La Scala

<sup>7</sup> Puccini to Ervin Lendvai, 17 May 1906, in Girardi, footnote 3, p. 267.

<sup>8</sup> “*Elektra-Krucziniska in jeder Beziehung ersten Ranges*”. Strauss to Hofmannsthal, 21 April 1909, footnote 3, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> “[...] mit Claudia Muzio als äußerst vornehmer und reizvoller *Marschallin*”. Strauss to Hofmannsthal, 5 October 1920, *ibid.*, p. 444.

<sup>10</sup> Puccini to Riccardo Schnabl, 22 December 1923, in Girardi, footnote 3, p. 268.





première (1911): “excellent Kapellmeister Serafin” was Strauss’s response to having heard him conduct in 1920.<sup>11</sup>

If the interpreters were a point of contact due in part to the operatic commercial system, from 1906 onwards, *Salome* became a reference point for Puccini, both in conditioning his own decisions and in evaluating the further work of his colleague, which he liked less and less, or so we would assume by examining his comments rather than his actions. In November 1906, Puccini became interested in Wilde’s *Florentine Tragedy*, thinking “it would be a project to rival *Salomé*,” he wrote to Ricordi, “but more human, more real”.<sup>12</sup> The following year he also considered *La Femme et le Pantin* of Pierre Louÿs, the writer of erotically charged literature to whom Wilde had dedicated his *Salomé*. Yet Puccini soon abandoned the project, reassuring his publisher that the reason “wasn’t the fear (away with that word) of the pruderies of the Anglo-Saxon audiences of Europe and America; it wasn’t the example of *Salomé* in New York.”<sup>13</sup> Puccini was probably at the Metropolitan Opera on 22 January 1907 for the sole performance of *Salome*, which was withdrawn because of its “explicit exposition of the most horrible, disgusting, revolting, and unmentionable features of degeneracy”: pruderies, indeed.<sup>14</sup>

With the emergence of *Salome*, Strauss had distinguished himself as an opera composer, and it was natural that Puccini took account of his rival, even if his own international primacy was never in danger. That is a reason why the barely hidden hostility revealed in these few lines addressed to Ricordi from Naples on 2 February 1908 resembles the antipathy that Mahler demonstrated towards Puccini on more than one occasion:

Yesterday I happened to go to the première of Salomé conducted by Strauss and sung (?) by Bellincioni, whose dancing was wonderful. It was a success. . . But how many will be convinced by that? The orchestral playing was a type of badly dressed Russian salad. But the composer was there – and [so] everyone says it was perfect. [...] When Strauss was rehearsing, trying to incite the orchestra to a coarse, violent performance, he said, ‘My dear gentlemen, this is not a question of music! It has to be a zoo. Come along, blow your instruments!’ Truly memorable!<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> “unter dem vortrefflichen Kapellmeister Serafin”, Strauss to Hofmannsthal, 5 October 1920, footnote 3, p. 444.

<sup>12</sup> Puccini a Giulio Ricordi, 14 November 1906, in Girardi, footnote 3, p. 268. The figure of the restless princess loomed again when he described to Illica (in a letter of 24 November 1908, *ibid.*) the finale of Wilde’s *Florentine Tragedy*, in which the betrayed husband kills his wife’s lover in a duel. Puccini observes that the woman, like Salome with Narraboth, “does not even deign to glance at the dying man”.

<sup>13</sup> “Non fu la paura (via questa parola) delle ‘pruderies’ dei pubblici anglosassoni d’Europa e d’America: non fu l’esempio di *Salomé* a New York”. Puccini to Giulio Ricordi, 11 April 1907 in Eugenio Gara (ed.): *Carteggi pucciniani*. Milan: Ricordi, 1958, p. 343.

<sup>14</sup> “*Salome* condemned”. Letter signed “Imparoancora”, in: *The New York Times*, 24 January 1907.

<sup>15</sup> Girardi, footnote 3, p. 268.





Even though Puccini did not often speak kindly about Strauss, throughout his life he followed the composer with great attention. One can hear some immediate effects on his harmonic and orchestral palette in *Fanciulla*, with the orchestra empowered to alternate thunderous roaring with moments of exquisite chamber music-like sonorities.

The first *bête noire* for Puccini was *Elektra*, which he saw at its Italian première at La Scala in 1909. “*Elektra?* a horror! *Salome* passes, but *Elektra* is too much” he told Sybil Seligman, friend and confidante in those years and until his death.<sup>16</sup> “Real garbage”, was his equally tranchant judgment of the first version of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which he saw in Berlin in 1913.<sup>17</sup> His view of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* was quite drastic, even if he had taken great pains to see it. After the Viennese performance of October 1920 he wrote to his friend Schnabl, “the more I think about *Die Frau ohne Schatten* [the more] I ask myself whether Strauss is serious in doing it”.<sup>18</sup> *Frau ohne Schatten* and *Ariadne* return again in a letter of 1922; after having characterized him as “one of those composers envious [of the success of others]”, Puccini observed that if Strauss:

had continued to write operas as he had begun, perhaps the envy would have vanished – but with the last two, especially the pandemonium without shadow, they increased his jealousy on account of the wide circulation [of Puccini’s works] outside of Vienna and in the United States . . .<sup>19</sup>

Again, a hardly flattering judgment, but behind it appears, as always, the phantom of *Salome*. Actually, Puccini is only restating an opinion directed to Illica ten years earlier, in 1913. Strauss “found a first subject and then drowned in others, believing that the fame acquired with the first provided a perfect absolution for his future . . . sins.”<sup>20</sup>

If one were to attempt to summarize, based on the data presented so far, it would seem that Puccini appreciated no other opera of Strauss after *Salome*, but that is not quite correct. Instead, I will try to demonstrate the contrary, focusing on Puccini’s later career, which perhaps unexpectedly offers points of contact with Strauss’s operas. Puccini understood very well that in the 1910s Strauss had turned over a new leaf and was no longer the iconoclast of *Salome*. A certain perplexity might explain his silence about *Rosenkavalier*, which he saw at its La Scala première in March 1911, fam-

<sup>16</sup> Puccini to Sybil Seligman, 16 April 1909, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> “Una vera porcheria”. Puccini to Elvira Puccini, 15 March 1913, unpublished letter in the collection of Peter Ross. I am grateful to Peter Ross, not only for his permission to publish this lapidary judgement, but also for the lively exchange of opinions concerning the drafts of this article. I also want to thank David Rosen for having suggested improvements to the text as well as translating it.

<sup>18</sup> “Quanto più penso alla *Donna senz’ombra* mi domando se fa sul serio Strauss”. Puccini to Schnabl, 1 December 1920, in Simonetta Puccini (ed.): *Giacomo Puccini. Lettere a Riccardo Schnabl*. Milan: Emme Ed. 1981), p. 104.

<sup>19</sup> “È un autore di quelli invidiosi. Se avesse seguitato a scrivere opere come aveva incominciato forse l’invidia se ne sarebbe ita – ma colle 2 ultime specie il pandemonio senz’ombra gli hanno aumentato la gelosia perché diffusione extra Vienna e uniti – nada”. Puccini to Schnabl, 4 October 1922, *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>20</sup> “Strauss (fu come altri) trovò un primo soggetto e si affogò in altri credendo che la fama acquistata col primo fosse un’assoluzione bella e buona per i successivi . . . peccati.” Puccini to Illica, 24 January 1913, in Gara, footnote 13, p. 408.





ous for the protests from the audience. Yet the opera must have interested him, as Strauss makes ample use of conversational singing, which characterizes many of Puccini's works, especially *Manon Lescaut*, which is brimming with eighteenth-century dances. Puccini returned to see *Rosenkavalier* in the following year in Budapest and in March 1913 in Berlin. In December of that year, while hard at work with the subject that would, after a series of mishaps, become *La rondine*, Puccini wrote to Eisner: "As for me, I shall never compose operetta: comic opera, yes: like *Rosenkavalier*, but more entertaining and more organic."<sup>21</sup> His plan, however, was less relevant to *La rondine*, a work dominated by the waltz and filled with intentionally superficial sentimentalism, than to the future *Trittico*; it was realized in *Gianni Schicchi*, an episode of comic (sometimes even savagely ironic) color — and extreme concision. The result of Puccini's incursion into the world of opera buffa reflects his resolve to write a "more entertaining and more organic" work than *Rosenkavalier*, that is, a work less heavily weighted towards the sentimental side and more organic and concise, thanks to his skilful use of leitmotifs.

While Strauss shielded his own creativity from progressive inclinations, Puccini, after the mixed reception of *Fanciulla*, whose harmony and orchestration suggested to commentators that the composer was following the path of Debussy and Strauss, declared to Clausetti in 1911: "Renew oneself or die? Today's harmony and orchestra are not the same. . . I promise myself, if I find the subject, to do better and better on the path I have set out upon, sure of not remaining in the rearguard."<sup>22</sup>

Puccini had always worried about the production of his operas, but from *Fanciulla* on this attention almost turned into an obsession. In this respect his letters resemble those of Strauss to Hofmannsthal. In Puccini's letters to Illica in 1912 he often discussed the *mise en scène*, citing important names in the fashionable world of Austrian and German theater, like Max Reinhardt:

As you'll see, the *mise en scène* has a special importance if new paths are to be explored. I've seen some shows [directed] by Reinhardt and was won over by the simplicity and power of the effects. Also, one can succeed in making a subject that's not very new (and what in the world is new?) seem original with new staging.<sup>23</sup>

And again:

You don't know what they've done and what they're doing in Russia, London, and Germany? In the midst of the exaggerated and out of place sumptuousness, there is a middle ground that you need to be aware of. I admire any effort made towards unusual productions.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Puccini to Angelo Eisner, 14 December 1913, in Girardi, footnote 3, p. 333.

<sup>22</sup> Puccini to Carlo Clausetti, 9 July 1911, *ibid.*, 327.

<sup>23</sup> Puccini to Illica, October 1912, *ibid.*, 261.

<sup>24</sup> "Tu non conosci cosa hanno fatto e fanno in Russia e a Londra e in Germania? In mezzo allo sfarzo esagerato e fuori di posto, vi è il registro medio, del quale deve tenersi conto. Io ammiro qualunque sforzo verso rappresentazioni non solite." Puccini to Illica, 8 October 1912, in Gara, footnote 13, p. 404.





It is to Max Reinhardt, the behind-the-scenes director of the première of *Rosenkavalier* and the instigator of the project, that we owe the principal changes in the staging starting from the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, among which is the interest in metatheatrical ‘games’, as in the first version of *Ariadne*. and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an antidote to Naturalism. The Gozzi renaissance, in particular, was launched in 1911 with Reinhardt’s production of *Turandotte*, translated and reworked by Vollmoeller, with incidental music by Busoni. Puccini had this production in mind when he decided to compose an opera on the same subject. Strauss’s debts to Reinhardt increased with two Berlin productions from the beginning of the century: Lachmann’s translation of Wilde’s play *Salome* and Hofmannstahl’s *Elektra* with Gertrud Eysolt as protagonist – productions which moved Strauss to work towards setting the plays to music.

A dense web, then, connects the theater of Strauss and Puccini, for some important dramatic elements and for a more flexible treatment of genre. Up to *Fanciulla*, a true “rescue opera”, Puccini had mainly treated the tragic. Although manipulating its conventions (the supernatural in *Le Villi*, as well as the comic episodes in the first two acts of *La bohème* and in the first act of *Madama Butterfly*), Puccini began to reflect on the nature of theatrical genres in order to draw together elements of three different genres in a single evening. With *La rondine*, he transformed the commission to write a Viennese operetta into a “sentimental comedy” (*commedia sentimentale*); after this, he chose to unite three different genres by juxtaposition: the tragedy noir of *Tabarro*, the lyric-pathetic of *Suor Angelica*, and the comic of *Gianni Schicchi*. The next step would be that of fusing elements of different genres into a single plot, developed without digressions with respect to the pseudo-Aristotelian unities of action, place, and time, as in *Turandot*.

I believe that Puccini was persuaded by his project, consciously or not, precisely because of Strauss’s development of opera – and more than that of any other contemporary composer. Furthermore, I am convinced that some characteristics of the theatrical narration and the aesthetic quality of Hofmannsthal’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* contributed to the fashioning of *Turandot*. Following Gozzi in the version of Werthes and Schiller, mediated by Maffei’s Italian adaptation, Puccini set the events “in Peking, in the epoch of fables”, and it is precisely the atmosphere of a fable, more than the oriental setting, that establishes a relationship with the setting of *Frau ohne Schatten*, which remains partially undefined. But the only two characters with names in *Frau ohne Schatten*, Barak, preceptor of Kalaf, and Keikobad, that is, “King Cheicobad de’ Carazani”, come from Gozzi’s *Turandot*.<sup>25</sup> And the magical apparatus, with the voices of spirits, may have influenced some experimental pages in

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<sup>25</sup> Hofmannsthal removed them from their context, perhaps to hide the connection with another of Gozzi’s theatrical fables, *Il corvo*, to which one can trace other elements developed by the German poet: the magic falcon and the hunt, as well as the transformation of Prince Jennaro of Frattombrose into a statue brought about by Armilla’s sorcerer father, such as what befalls the emperor before his wife’s eyes in *Frau ohne Schatten* (Act III, scene 3).







Act I of *Turandot*: the macabre chorus of phantoms and the sensual chorus of Turandot's handmaidens.

And then, if we consider the structure of the plot of *Turandot* and the cast of characters and their vocal types, *Ariadne* comes into play, for its action revolves upon the simultaneous presence of the tragic genre and the comic genre personified by the *commedia dell'arte* masks. The circle brings us back to Gozzi by way of Reinhardt, and therefore to Ping, Pong, and Pang, masks transformed into Chinese dignitaries by Puccini's librettists at the composer's behest. In the principal roles the links between Ariadne, the Empress, and Turandot (with the help of Jeritza, ideal interpreter of the Chinese princess) are not limited to the harsh vocal style, with leaps from the low and middle register to the highest register, but also involve their particular dramatic features: three heroines with aspects of fable and mythology who have 'difficulties' in their relationships with the opposite sex. Ariadne is abandoned by Theseus; the Empress cannot have children because she is poised between the world of spirits and that of humans; Turandot, made frigid by a trauma suffered by an ancestor centuries ago, rejects her lover, declaring herself "figlia del cielo" (daughter of heaven). Their lack of connection to a precise historical period makes them extremely modern women, and if the Empress wins back her human nature through sacrifice and compassion, Turandot regains her human sentiments in the confrontation with her enflamed suitor before and after Liù's death. Moreover, the Emperor and Calaf, heroic tenors like Bacchus, are in the power of the women they love, while traces of humanity in the dyer's wife reappear in Liù. Suggestions also come from the trope of the journey of initiation: Strauss openly turned to *Zauberflöte*, especially in the third act of *Frau ohne Schatten*, which is a mass of tests. But the supreme challenge is also that of the three riddles in *Turandot*, where what is at stake is the anti-tragic victory of love. Moreover, the three operas have in common their *gran finales*, the Grail eagerly pursued by Puccini: it is the victory of love that concludes *Ariadne*, when the title character withdraws with Bacchus, while Zerbinetta comments sagely upon the action (and in a more grandiose fashion in *Frau ohne Schatten*), with the happiness of the two couples, an allegory of conjugal virtue following the tradition established by the finales of *Zauberflöte* and *Fidelio*.

I want to conclude by returning briefly to the mixture of genres that characterizes *Turandot*. Given the emphasis on the heroic element associated with the principal characters and the enormous importance that the pathetic element assumes with Liù's death, Puccini gave special care to integrating the comic element into the drama. Besides important scenes in the first and third acts, he dedicated a substantial scene to the three masks, placing it directly before the scene with the three riddles, thus focusing attention on the reflections of the characters and creating a type of prologue to add power to the irruption of the 'Grandiose', that is, the palace in Act II. Puccini thought long and hard about this scene shortly before his death, observing to his collaborators: "we need to find a scenic effect for this trio". He sketched a "balustrade adorned with marble statues" on which they should "have the masks either seated, stretched out, or astride [their chairs]. I'm not explaining it well, but I know that in Vienna they did something similar with the Italian masks in Strauss's







*Ariadne*.<sup>26</sup> Wanting to valorize the comic element, Puccini thought of *Ariadne* once more, referring to the Wilhelm von Wymetal and Anton Brioschi production in the repertoire from October 1916. Hofmannsthal too was concerned about the precise balance between tragic and comic. Writing to Strauss shortly before the production opened, he complained:

“scant justice is being done, either by the music or on the stage, to the comic figures at the end – they are being dropped – so that one has, unfortunately, a sense of being left in mid-air. The music cannot be changed, but the production on the stage can, and you must settle it by a word with Wymetal, as your (and my) express wish that Zerbinetta (coming up the staircase) must be accompanied by her companions and they must all stand there for a moment, receiving the spot light.”<sup>27</sup>

Puccini was not able to supervise the première of his work, but this recollection, less than two months before his death, is a final sign of his respect for Strauss, which went well beyond the criticisms found in his correspondence. In any case, Puccini’s attitude is more generous than the caustic gastronomic comparison that Strauss made in a 1939 letter to Clemens Krauss between his own music, “an artisanal salame, that will be good for a long time”, and Puccini’s: “an exquisite sausage of white meat”, to be eaten within two hours after its preparation.<sup>28</sup> In the name of the “the improbable humanity of fairy tales”,<sup>29</sup> pursued vigorously, Puccini, unlike his colleague, was able to amalgamate several different genres into a single work, and only his death prevented him from convincingly resolving the “thawing” (sgelamento) of his princess.

But operas speak beyond their authors. Despite the clear difference in their harmonic and orchestral language, Strauss and Puccini shared important features: the attention they directed almost exclusively towards the female protagonists, a discerning use of the *Leitmotiv*, but especially a grasp of the sense of the drama and an instinct for a *coup de théâtre* (even if applied to subjects with an entirely different nature). Most important, together with Janáček and Berg, Puccini and Strauss were among the

<sup>26</sup> Puccini to Giuseppe Adami, 8 October 1924, in Girardi, footnote 3, p. 455. Puccini probably saw a performance of the revised version of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, in the production directed by Wymetal, when he was in Vienna from 2 October to 4 November 1920 for the Viennese premières of *La rondine* and of *Il trittico*.

<sup>27</sup> “die heiteren Figuren sind zum Schluß nicht zu ihrem Recht gekommen, weder in der Musik noch in der Erscheinung – sie sind fallen gelassen – und daraus resultiert ein Gefühl von Inkomplettheit, leider. In der Musik läßt sich nichts ändern, wohl aber im Szenischen: das müssen aber Sie in einem Gespräch mit W. noch festlegen, als Ihren (und meinen) bestimmten Willen, es müssen mit Zerbinetta ihre Gefährten mitkommen (die Treppe herauf), und müssen für einen Augenblick, Licht bekommend, dastehen.” Hofmannsthal to Strauss, October 1916, footnote 3, p. 350.

<sup>28</sup> “[...] wenn ich Puccini mit einer delikaten Weißwurst vergleiche, die um 10 Uhr Früh (2 Stunden nach Fabrikation) gegessen werden muß (allerdings hat man um 1 Uhr schon wieder Appetit auf etwas reelles), während die Salami (kompakter gearbeitet) eben doch ein bißchen länger vorhält.” Strauss to Clemens Krauss, 14. September 1939, in Günter Brosche (ed.): *Richard Strauss – Clemens Krauss. Briefwechsel: Gesamtausgabe*. Tutzing: Schneider 1997, p. 240.

<sup>29</sup> “l’inverosimile umanità del fiabesco”. Giuseppe Adami: *Puccini*. Milan: Treves 1935, p. 174.





last composers to possess an authentic instinct for narration in music, realized in a series of operas that represent an extreme act of faith in tradition, works that called for efforts stretching to the point of exhaustion of their composers' powers.





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## WEIßWURST VS SALAMI: PUCCINI UND STRAUSS Chronik einer fruchtbaren Rivalität

Besonders seit der Uraufführung der *Salome* erscheint Strauss' Name häufig in Puccinis Korrespondenz. Sowohl die Sticheleien des Italieners gegen Strauss als auch dessen vorherrschendes Schweigen über Puccini sind Annzeichen einer Konkurrenz, die wiederum als Ausdruck der Lebendigkeit ihrer jeweiligen Bühnenwerke gewertet werden kann. Doch war Puccinis Interesse an Strauss schon durch dessen Tondichtungen wie *Don Quixote* oder *Ein Heldenleben* geweckt worden.

1900 war es zunächst Puccinis *Tosca*, die mit der krankhaften Besessenheit des Scarpia das europäische Operntheater infizierte und auch bei anderen Komponisten das Interesse an psychotischen Charakteren weckte. Ist es Zufall, dass Strauss seine *Salome* mit ähnlichen musikalischen Mitteln charakterisierte wie Puccini den Scarpia?

Mit der doppelten italienischen Erstaufführung der *Salome* unter Strauss in Turin und unter Toscanini in Mailand im Dezember 1906 begann ein reger Austausch zwischen den Opern von Strauss und Puccini, was die Besetzung der weiblichen Hauptrollen betrifft: Sängerinnen, die zuvor in Puccini-Rollen gegläntzt hatten, prägten nun die Strauss'schen Charaktere und umgekehrt – angefangen mit Emmy Destinn (*Butterfly*, *Minnie / Salome*) und Gemma Bellincioni (*Santuzza*, *Fedora / Salome*) über Claudia Muzio (*Giorgetta / Marschallin*) bis hin zu Maria Jeritza (*Minnie*, *Tosca*, *Turandot / Ariadne*, *Kaiserin*) und Lotte Lehmann (*Octavian*, *Marschallin*, *Frau des Färbers*, *Christine / Suor Angelica*, *Mimi*, *Tosca*, *Cio-Cio-San*).

Darüber hinaus aber wurde Strauss' *Salome* zu einem Referenzpunkt für Puccinis weiteres Schaffen. Eine zeitlang erwog er sogar die Vertonung von Stoffen von Oscar Wildes oder aus dessen Umfeld. Und selbst wenn Puccini sich häufig abwertend über spätere Opern von Strauss, wie *Elektra*, *Ariadne auf Naxos* oder *Die Frau ohne Schatten* äußerte, so zeigt sich doch in seinen Werken, das er davon nicht unbeeindruckt blieb. *Der Rosenkavalier*, zu dem sich Puccini zunächst gar nicht äußerte, gab letztlich einen wichtigen Impuls. Wenn er eine komische Oper schreiben werde, so Puccini, dann niemals im Stil der Operette, sondern „wie der *Rosenkavalier*, aber unterhaltsamer und organischer“ – was er schließlich in *Gianni Schicchi* umsetzte.

Gleichzeitig setzte sich Puccini mit den Neuerungen des deutschsprachigen Theaters durch Hofmannsthal und Max Reinhardt auseinander. Insbesondere in *Turandot* offenbart sich die enge Verflechtung zwischen den Vorstellungen, von denen Strauss und Puccini gleichermaßen geprägt waren. So greift Hofmannsthal mit Keikobad und Barak (*Frau ohne Schatten*) auf Figuren aus Carlo Gozzis *Turandot* zurück, das wiederum den Stoff für Puccinis Oper lieferte. Gleichzeitig findet sich die Konstellation der Charaktere sowie die Verbindung tragischer und komischer Elemente aus *Ariadne auf*





*Naxos* auch in Puccinis *Turandot*. Nicht nur weisen die Titelcharaktere der drei genannten Opern deutliche Parallelen auf; die großen Finales gleichen sich auch in ihrer Überhöhung der Kraft der Liebe.

Ungeachtet der Unterschiede in Harmonik und Orchestersprache verbinden Strauss und Puccini einige entscheidende Gemeinsamkeiten: das Interesse an weiblichen Protagonisten, der kunstvolle Umgang mit Leitmotiven, aber vor allem der Sinn für das Dramatische und der Instinkt für den *coup de théâtre*. Zusammen mit Janáček und Berg gehören sie zu den letzten Komponisten, deren Opern durch ein authentisches Gespür für die erzählerische Kraft der Musik gekennzeichnet sind.

