



Jeff Kitto, Andrea Garritano and Megan King

BOB ZELLAR/Gazette Staff

Jeff Kitto, Andrea Garritano and Megan King, from left, are featured in "Turandot," which plays Feb. 26 at the Alberta Bair Theater. The out-of-costume trio gathered for a photo shoots at Wild Ginger in downtown Billings.



"Turandot"

From left, Megan King sings the role of slave girl Liu, Jeff Kitto is Prince Calaf and Andrea Garritano is Turandot in the NOVA Center production of "Turandot." CASEY PAGE/Gazette Staff

PUCCINI'S 'TURANDOT'

'Turandot' is operatic adventure

Operatic adventure features elaborate sets, costumes

By JACI WEBB jwebb@billingsgazette.com

One way to look at Puccini's "Turandot" is as the "The Hunger Games" of the opera world.

There is no female warrior wielding a bow, but the title character of "Turandot" has been described as "tiger-like" and of unrelenting pride. She has beheaded so many princes she feels immortal. Andrea Garritano, who plays Turandot in the Feb. 27 production at the Alberta Bair Theater, believes her character is out of touch with humanity so she doesn't feel sorrow for the princes who risk their lives for a chance to marry her. Like the dark games in "Hunger Games," "Turandot" features a dark game of riddles. Winner takes the princess for his bride, the loser is beheaded. And there are lots of losers.

"It's kind of adventure at the opera," Garritano said.

Because "Turandot" is set in an ancient Chinese city, the costumes and the set are even more elaborate than those of other operas. And because it was written by Puccini, the music is complex and beautiful.

The production is being presented by NOVA Center for the Performing Arts. Show time is 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 27. Tickets range from \$21 for students to \$36 and \$46 for adults.

'Turandot'

Set in ancient China, "Turandot" exudes the grandeur of its folklore, as demonstrated in Andrea Garritano's costuming. Garritano, a soprano, sings in the role of the title character in the NOVA Center production set for Feb. 27 at the Alberta Bair Theater.

Puccini died in 1924 before he was able to finish the score for "Turandot," but his student Franco Alfano completed the final duet in 1926 using Puccini's notes.

Music director Andy Anderson has researched "Turandot" and led eight previous productions of it. He said "Turandot" is his favorite, partially because of its challenges.

"It is a spectacle with the Chinese folklore, all of the singing, the cast, the set. It's one of the grandest of the grand operas," Anderson said.

The tenor aria, "Nessun Dorma," sung in this production by Bozeman native Jeff Kitto, is one of the most well-known in the opera world, made famous by Luciano Pavarotti's performance of it.

For Kitto, the challenge is saving himself for that iconic aria because it falls in the second half of the production. And he's on stage and singing in almost every scene.

“The aria is so climactic in the opera. I have to make sure I have saved enough to make it magnificent because everybody is waiting for that,” Kitto said.

Kitto plays Prince Calaf, but his character is referred to as the unknown prince for most of "Turandot" because he is traveling incognito after being banished from his country. Prince Calaf is hoping to find a new country to reign over. His father is the deposed King Timur, played by Douglas Nagel.

Turandot challenges each of her suitors to solve three riddles. If they cannot solve all three, they are beheaded. Prince Calaf takes on the challenge and gets all three correct, making Turandot upset because she does not want to keep her part of the bargain and marry Calaf. So he challenges her to find out his real name.

No one knows who this foreign prince is except for the slave girl Liu, played by Megan King.

“I am a very selfless character,” King said of her role. “I have this infatuation with Calaf because he smiled at me one day. That is the motivation for everything I’ve done to help him and his father.”

In a compelling scene in Act 3, Liu commits suicide rather than reveal Calaf’s real name. King said she has performed the role three times and it has now become her favorite role.

“For me, she is the most perfectly written character,” King said. “She has a pure, genuine love — not realistic, but the purity of heart.”

King said her voice has matured since she last performed as Liu and she expects to be able to bring more to the role than ever before.

Liu’s suicide changes Turandot’s attitude, and at last she realizes that she is human, too.

“The slave’s suicide rocks my character to the core,” Garritano said. “Finally, my character says, ‘What is this force in your heart that drives you?’ It is love.”



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'Turandot'

Jeff Kitto plays Prince Calaf in "Turandot," presented by the NOVA Center for the Performing Arts. Kitto's challenging role includes the famed aria "Nessun Dorma."

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Conductor and Music director Andy Anderson, left, is joined by other members of the NOVA Center production crew for "Turandot." They are, from left, Dodie Rife, Matthew Haney, Lucinda Butler and Eric Andries.

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