



**PRESS RELEASE**

May 2009

## **Puccini's 'music from the heart' crowns this year's Henley Festival**

With one night's main stage concert given over to Puccini, The Henley Festival 2009 looks set to excel itself with a performance of pure operatic indulgence on Thurs 9<sup>th</sup> July. Sung by internationally renowned soloists Rebecca Evans, Gwyn Hughes Jones and George von Bergen, together with the Joyful Company of Singers, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and the Festival audiences' favourite conductor Nicolae Moldoveanu, it is no surprise that the Box Office is reporting only a few of the best grandstand seats are still available. The emotional pull of some of the world's greatest arias are promised - from *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madame Butterfly* and *Turandot*, amongst others.

We talked to The Henley Festival's Artistic Director, Stewart Collins, about his choice of Puccini for this year's Festival. He told us, "When he died in 1924, the Italian composer Giacomo Puccini left in excess of \$4 million in his will. Translate that to 21<sup>st</sup> century values and you can immediately appreciate that this guy was HUGE. He was every bit the international superstar and he lived the life to match. For instance, when in New York for the launch of his opera *The Girl of the Golden West* he autographed a few bars of Musetta's waltz from *La Bohème* for \$500, which he used as a down payment for a speedboat!"

"He was famous quite simply because he touched a public nerve with the sheer approachability and realism of his operas. Other composers may have turned opera into an art form, but Puccini turned it into public property - and it remains just that. Tell me the

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person who doesn't recognise *Nessun Dorma* – or 'Pavarotti's football song' as it is still sometimes referred to!"

And he continues, "In my view you would need a heart of stone not to be drawn into the music of Puccini. In *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madame Butterfly*, Puccini created three of the most heart throb stories ever seen on the stage and that is without mentioning *Turandot* – from which we get *Nessun Dorma* – and his other masterpieces *Manon Lescaut* and *Gianni Schicchi* (from which we all know *O mio babbino caro*). All of these masterworks feature in a Henley opera gala featuring leading soloists from the world's top opera houses and all presented by Radio 4's James Naughtie who takes an early night off from the *Today* programme to host a programme of music by a composer about whom he presented a special one off feature for BBC Radio earlier this year."

For information and tickets for the Henley Festival, please ring the Box Office on 01491 843404 or look on the website, [www.henley-festival.co.uk](http://www.henley-festival.co.uk) Generous sponsors of this year's Festival include: Invesco Perpetual, Westcoast, Laurent-Perrier champagne, Lavazza, Hotel du Vin, Southern Electric.

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**Note to Editors: Henley Festival Trust**

As in previous years, all net proceeds from The Henley Festival 2009 will go direct to parent charity The Henley Festival Trust, to finance Henley Festival's charitable and community activities. Examples of this valuable, and much appreciated work include providing: visual arts workshops at the Chiltern Centre for Disabled Children, music therapy for brain-injured attendees at Headway day centre in Henley-on-Thames, music and arts workshops in local schools, and instruments for promising young musicians.

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