Born to a very musical family, his family had provided five generations of organists and composers to the Cathedral of San Martino.

At 14, he took over as the organist at the Cathedral of San Martino and he began to compose his own music.

At 18, Puccini fell in love with opera when he and his brother walked 20 miles to see Verdi's Aida.

He decided to study composition at the Milan Conservatory. His first attempt at opera was the one-act La villi for a local competition soon after he graduated. Even though it didn't win, the piece gained a small group of admirers, who ultimately funded its production.

'La bohème', was his first major work. It quickly gained momentum and now is part of the standard Italian opera repertory.

Over the course of his life, Puccini composed 10 operas, 30 concert arias, 4 chamber pieces and 30 other pieces.

Listen to excerpt from La Boheme