

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Tosca



Music by Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Based on the drama by Victorien Sardou

Opera in Three Acts
Sung in Italian

Location: Rome, Italy
Time: June 17th and 18th, 1800
The aftermath of the French Revolution

Characters

Floria Tosca, celebrated singer (soprano).....Angela Gheorghiu
Mario Cavaradossi, painter (tenor)Jonas Kaufmann
Baron Vitellio Scarpia, Chief of Police (baritone)Bryn Terfel
Cesare Angelotti, former Consul of the Roman republic (bass).....Lukas Jakobski
Church Sacristan (bass)..... Jeremy White
Spoletta, police agent (tenor)Hubert Francis
Sciarrone, gendarme (bass)..... ZhengZhong Zhou
Shepherd Boy (alto)William Payne
Jailer (bass)John Morrissey

Conducted by Antonio Pappano
Orchestra and Chorus of The Royal Opera House

Première performance in Rome, Italy, at the Teatro Costanzi on January 14, 1900

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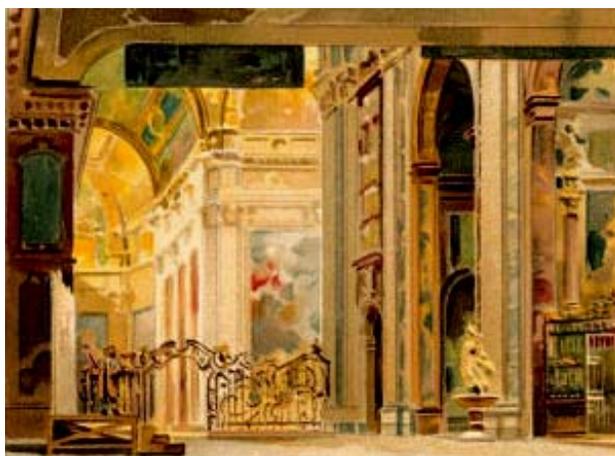
Synopsis

Background: In the aftermath of the French Revolution, a libertarian and republican spirit had arisen in Italy. However, with the declaration of war on France by Ferdinand IV of Naples and his wife Maria Carolina, such a movement had come to be regarded as treacherous. Rome was taken by the French, and a “Roman republic” was established with Cesare Angelotti as one of its consuls. The French march south, taking Naples and a republic allied to France, was established there. Queen Maria Carolina, having fled to Sicily with her husband, organized a force which, together with the British, Russians and Austrians, drove the French from Naples. Her forces marched on Rome, re-taking the city. The Queen moved there, leaving Ferdinand in Sicily. A secret police force came into being, headed by Baron Vitellio Scarpia, and aided by spies and informers. The opera takes place against this background, in the afternoon, evening, and early morning of June 17th and 18th, 1800, with the collapse of the republic. Angelotti has been imprisoned for treason but, as the curtain rises, he has just escaped from Castel Sant’Angelo.

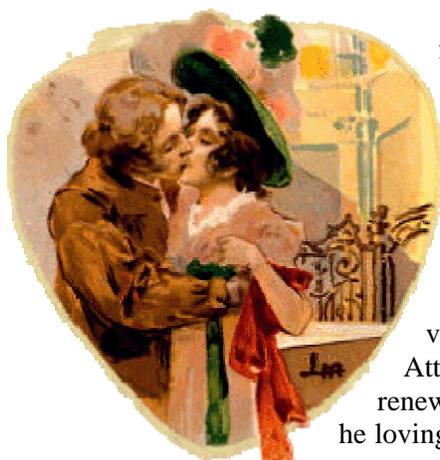
Act I

The church of Sant’ Andrea della Valle in Rome

Cesare Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner, rushes into the church of Sant’ Andrea della Valle to hide in the Attavanti chapel. Using a key left hidden for him by his sister, the Marchesa Attavanti, he lets himself into their family chapel, where a disguise of women’s clothing has been left. An old Sacristan shuffles in, praying at the sound of the Angelus.



Mario Cavaradossi enters the church to continue working on his portrait of Mary Magdalene, inspired by the Marchesa Attavanti, Angelotti’s sister, whom he has recently seen praying in the church. Taking out a miniature photograph of his lover, Floria Tosca, he lovingly compares her raven beauty with that of the blonde Magdalene. *[This famous aria, “Recondita armonia,” is a favorite of tenors and is frequently performed in concert.]* The Sacristan grumbles disapproval and leaves.



Angelotti ventures out and is barely recognizable by his friend and fellow patriot, Mario Cavaradossi, who gives him a basket of food for his hunger. They are interrupted by the arrival of Cavaradossi’s lover, Floria Tosca, a famous opera singer, who is standing outside the church gate. She impatiently calls out for Mario to open the gate to let her in. Cavaradossi hurries Angelotti back into the chapel.

Forever suspicious, Tosca jealously questions Mario about his activities. After she prays, she reminds him of their rendezvous at his villa later that evening. Suddenly she recognizes the Marchesa Attavanti in the painting of Mary Magdalene. Tosca explodes with renewed suspicions and accuses Cavaradossi of seeing another woman, but he lovingly reassures her that he loves only her. He hurries her out, arranging to meet at his villa later that evening.

Once Tosca has left, Cavaradossi summons Angelotti from the chapel and offers him the use of his villa to hide out. If there is danger, he warns him to climb halfway down the well in his garden where there is a hiding space. A cannon is suddenly heard, signaling that Angelotti's escape has been discovered. The two quickly flee to Mario's villa.

The Sacristan returns with choirboys who are to sing in a Te Deum (church hymn) that day. Their excitement is quickly silenced by the entrance of Baron Scarpia, chief of the secret police, who is searching for the escaped Angelotti. He interrogates the Sacristan without success. He then discovers a fan which was dropped from the bundle of women's clothing. Recognizing the crest on the fan as belonging to Angelotti's sister, he connects Angelotti with Cavaradossi's portrait. He asks the Sacristan who painted it, and recognizes Cavaradossi as a revolutionary, as well as being Tosca's lover. He then finds the empty basket of food and concludes that it was Angelotti who ate it.

Tosca returns to explain to Cavaradossi that she must perform in the celebratory cantata and will be unable to meet him at the villa that night. Finding him gone she immediately becomes suspicious. Scarpia decides to use the abandoned fan to further provoke her jealousy. Tosca runs off to confront Cavaradossi and his supposed lover at the villa. Scarpia sends three of his agents to follow her.

The church slowly fills with worshippers, and the Te Deum begins. With the backdrop of the church hymn, Scarpia schemes to himself how he plans to claim Tosca for himself and send Cavaradossi to the gallows. This chilling aria ends with Scarpia declaring, "Tosca, you make me forget God!" Scarpia then joins the church chorus in the prayer.

Act II

Scarpia's apartment, on the upper floor of the Palazzo Farnese

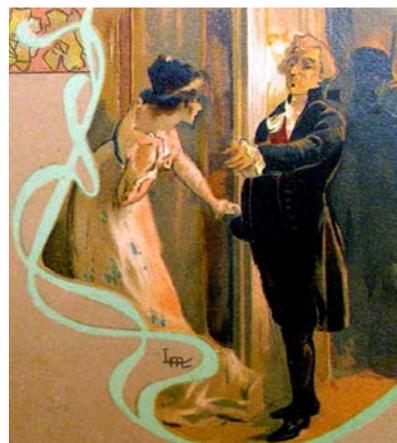


Eating his dinner alone Scarpia obsesses about his sinister plan for Tosca and Cavaradossi. He gives Spoletta, one of his agents, a note to pass to Tosca when she arrives to sing the cantata. Alone, Scarpia reflects on his sadistic pleasure of bending women to his will. "The violent conquest has stronger appeal than soft surrender. I crave; I pursue the thing I crave, I satisfy myself, cast it aside and then seek new bait." He eagerly anticipates claiming Tosca as his next prize. *[This is one of the most melodious arias written for a baritone part.]*

Spoletta returns from Cavaradossi's villa, having found no trace of Angelotti. To appease the enraged Scarpia he has arrested Cavaradossi, hoping that he will concede the location of Angelotti. Seemingly pleased with Cavaradossi's arrest, Scarpia calls him in for questioning. Cavaradossi defiantly denies any knowledge of Angelotti's escape or his present whereabouts.

In the background Tosca is heard singing a cantata at a royal gala downstairs. When the cantata is over she bursts into Scarpia's room and embraces Cavaradossi. Scarpia sends Cavaradossi off to another room for further interrogation and torture. He then turns his attention to Tosca. She will give no information. Scarpia opens the door wider in the adjacent room to reveal Mario's anguish. Unnerved by Scarpia's questioning and the sound of Mario's agonizing screams behind the door, she reluctantly reveals Angelotti's hiding place.

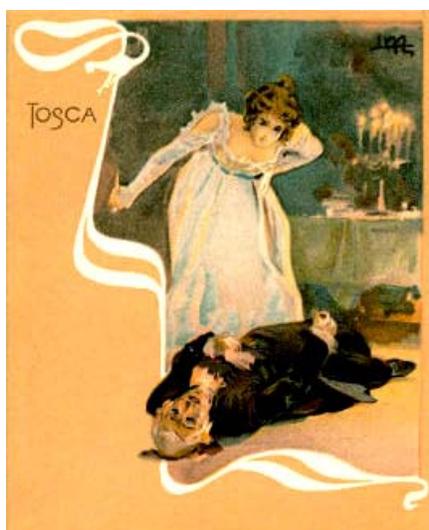
Mario is carried back into the room, his head bleeding from the torture device. Upon hearing that it was actually Tosca who had betrayed him he turns on her angrily. Suddenly Sciarrone, one of Scarpia's agents, rushes in to announce that Napoleon had been defeated by General Melas at Marengo — this is a blow to Scarpia.



Mario is elated by the news and shouts his defiance of tyranny, “Vittoria!” Provoked by his treasonous outburst Scarpia sentences him to death as a traitor. Mario is immediately dragged off to prison to await his execution.

Scarpia calmly resumes his dinner and begins his diabolical scheme. He offers Tosca a way of saving Cavaradossi’s life — she must give herself to him. Fighting off his grasp, she protests her fate to God, having dedicated her life to art and love. [*This one of Puccini’s most beautiful and famous arias, “Vissi d’arte.”*] When she finishes the aria Scarpia mockingly applauds her drama.

Spoletta enters and reveals that, faced with capture, Angelotti had killed himself. He awaits instructions from Scarpia as to what to do with Cavaradossi. Scarpia calmly defers the decision to Tosca. Conflicted by her choices, she reluctantly agrees to Scarpia’s cruel proposition. Scarpia immediately calls in Spoletta to give him orders of Cavaradossi’s release. To save face, Scarpia explains to Tosca, Cavaradossi must be thought of as dead. With Tosca as witness, Scarpia informs Spoletta that they will change the execution to one of shooting Cavaradossi with blanks, after which he is to be released. Scarpia adds further instructions to Spoletta that it is to be an execution similar to that of Palmieri. Spoletta acknowledges that he understands what he is to do and leaves the room.



Satisfied with Scarpia’s plan, Tosca then insists on a safe-conduct pass for herself and Cavaradossi, so that they can both leave Rome immediately. Scarpia agrees. As he writes the safe-conduct pass, Tosca feeling miserable and defeated, suddenly catches sight of a knife lying on the dinner table. Scarpia finishes writing the pass and moves in to embrace Tosca. She suddenly, and without warning, plunges the knife into Scarpia’s heart. As he writhes on the floor dying, Tosca taunts him contemptuously, “Is your blood choking you? Die, accursed!”

When Scarpia is dead, Tosca anxiously searches for the safe-conduct pass. She finds it still clenched in Scarpia’s hand. Tosca wrenches it from his grasp. She then takes the two large candlesticks from the desk and places one on either side of Scarpia’s head. Finally, she places a crucifix on his chest. Looking back at Scarpia in disgust, she remarks, “Before him all of Rome trembled!” Tosca then she slips quickly from the room.

Act III

Castel Sant’Angelo, where Cavaradossi is due to be shot

As dawn breaks a shepherd boy’s song is heard in the distance. The nearby church bells ring for matins (morning prayer). In the Castel Sant’Angelo Cavaradossi awaits execution in one hour. He offers the jailer his ring if could just write a farewell note to Tosca. The jailer hesitates, and then agrees. Overcome with memories of love, Mario gives way to despair and sings one of the most famous arias in the tenor repertoire, “El lucevan le stele.”

Tosca arrives with the safe-conduct pass, which she and Cavaradossi ecstatically read out loud together. She tells him how she murdered Scarpia and explains about the mock execution. Mario caresses the hands that committed murder for his sake, and the two salute their future.

As the firing squad appears, Tosca coaches Mario on how to fake his death convincingly. The soldiers carry out the execution and then depart. Tosca goes to rouse Cavaradossi, but discovers to her horror that he is really dead — the execution was real!

Spoletta has discovered Scarpia’s body. He, with his agents and the soldiers, rush in to arrest Tosca for Scarpia’s murder. Tosca runs to the parapet and leaps onto it, crying, “O Scarpia! We shall meet before God!” She then hurls herself over the ledge to her death.

Giacomo Puccini

Born: Lucca, Italy, December 22, 1858 — Died: Brussels, Belgium, November 29, 1924



Giacomo Puccini was the fifth generation of a family of professional musicians and composers, living and working in and around Lucca, Tuscany Italy. When he was just five years old his father died.

Puccini eventually took over his father's position of choirmaster and organist at San Martino Church. It was expected that Giacomo follow in the path of his ancestors who were church composers and organists, continuing the long family tradition. All that changed for him one night in 1876 when he and a friend walked thirteen miles to the city of Pisa to see a production of Verdi's *Aida*. From that moment on Giacomo knew that his true passion would be opera.

In 1880, Puccini completed his studies at the Pacini Institute in Lucca. He had just finished composing a mass, *Messa di Gloria*. This encouraged his great-uncle to help support his musical education. A scholarship was also granted from Queen Margherita at Milan's Conservatorio. Milan, with its famous Teatro alla Scala, was the place to be for all young up-and-coming composers.

For three years (1880-1883) Giacomo continued his studies at the Conservatorio. As a graduating exercise he composed an orchestral piece, *Capriccio sinfonico*, which was performed by the student orchestra. It achieved great success at its performance and foretold the gifts that were to be — of operas blending intense emotion and theatricality with tender lyricism, colorful orchestration and a rich vocal line.

Meanwhile, the music-publishing firm of Edoardo Sonzogno announced the first of several competitions for a one-act opera. (Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* was discovered in this way in 1889.) Puccini, then still a pupil of the Conservatorio, decided to take part in it. A young librettist and journalist, Ferninando Fontana, suggested that he compose an opera around the story *Le Villi* (the Witches). Though Puccini didn't win, the opera was produced successfully in 1884 at Milan. As a result, the great Milanese music publisher, Giulio Ricordi, acquired the rights of *Le Villi*, and commissioned Puccini to write a new opera, again with the young Fontana as his librettist. This was the beginning a life-long association of Puccini and Ricordi, in whom he found a fatherly friend and wise guide.

Puccini was a perfectionist, writing just eight full-length operas, compared to Verdi's 28. He set high standards for himself and everyone else involved in his operas. His early works show German influence. Later works show the influence of Debussy, and even a touch of the atonality of Schoenberg. But he never strayed too far from his melodic Italian roots or lost his attachment to his native Tuscany.

He worked tirelessly with the sopranos who played his heroines. Maria Jeritza, Puccini's favorite Tosca, recalled, "Sometimes he would make me so angry I wanted to cry. He would say, 'if ever I wake you at three in the morning and ask you to sing a high C, you will sing a high C.'"

When he was financially able, he bought a villa at Torre del Lago, living there much of his life. He was eventually driven away by the smell of a peat factory built during World War I. Puccini took no interest in politics and thought the war a mistake from the start. His lack of enthusiasm for the war was one reason for his falling out with his fiercely patriotic friend, conductor Arturo Toscanini.

He was fond of hunting and smoking, and was fascinated with the mechanical marvels of his day. He owned a wireless and a phonograph and corresponded with Thomas Edison. He also owned several automobiles and motor yachts. He barely survived one of the first car crashes in Italy. Puccini once described himself as a "mighty hunter of wild fowl, operatic librettos and attractive women."

Puccini was a notorious lady's man, but he was innocent of the scandal that most shook his marriage. Convinced he was having an affair with a maidservant, his wife, Elvira, drove the young girl from the house and publicly denounced her. The girl was so shaken that she committed suicide, whereupon it was determined that she was in fact a virgin.

Near the end of his life, Puccini was still striving for greatness with his last opera, *Turandot*. Marek wrote, "He became a frightening taskmaster, not only with his librettists but, above all, with himself. He was bent on doing something new, determined to write music of much larger scope, of legendary stature and philosophic implication." In the opinion of some critics, he nearly succeeded. Only death by throat cancer in 1924 prevented him from finishing and polishing the opera. At the first performance of *Turandot* at Milan's La Scala in 1926, the conductor, Toscanini, ended the performance in the middle of the third act (after Liù's death), turning to the audience, "At this point the Maestro laid down his pen."

Tosca

Tosca is the fifth of Puccini's twelve operas, and was written when the composer was riding the crest of the wave of his early success. He finally set to work in earnest on the score in the spring of 1898, two years after the premiere of *La Bohème*.

Tosca is a story of cheating and doubt — nothing seems honest and direct — even love is troubled by jealousy. In *Tosca*, Puccini explored the dark side of human emotion, a marked change from the late-Romantic sentimentality of *La Bohème*. Also, in contrast to *La Bohème*, where the villain was fate and the action minimal, both heroes and villains are humans who struggle on stage, and the clashes are always between single individuals.

Musically, Puccini learned how to transcend pure lyricism and achieve real drama. He was deeply involved with revisions to the text, abandoning a second-act aria and quartet during Cavaradossi's torture at Scarpia's hand, which the composer felt was an obsolete operatic convention which detracted from the drama. The result is one of the most tension-filled scenes in opera.

In *Tosca* Puccini deepened his interest in realistic detail. He contacted musicians at the Vatican to find a text appropriate for the assembly to be muttering as they gathered behind Scarpia's monologue for the "Te Deum" at the close of Act I. Unable to find a liturgically-appropriate prayer, he used a text he found in an old prayer book. He also requested the exact pitch of the largest bell at the Vatican, an "E" below the staff and traveled to Rome, climbed the parapet of the Castel Sant'Angelo and listened to the play of bells from the various Basilicas in Rome announcing Matins, or morning prayer. He then recreated the sound in the opening of the Third Act. The composer contacted the Ministry of Education in Rome to secure authentic verses for the off-stage shepherd boy's song in the Third Act.

This desire for realism was typical of the verismo style of his contemporaries. While Puccini's genius is considered to be more unique, *Tosca* is definitely one of his more "veristic" works in dramatic content and musical treatment, and his fascination with authenticity continued to enrich his operas.

Ricordi scheduled the premiere for January 14, 1900 at the Opera Costanzi in Rome, the actual setting of the opera. All artists involved represented a new breed of singer/actor that eschewed the stilted acting style typical of most nineteenth-century Italian productions and sought a more dramatic physical portrayal in keeping with the verismo movement.

The producer, Tito Ricordi, the publisher's son, added intrigue to the premiere by banning the press and all interested observers from the rehearsals. Rumors began to spread that an anti-Puccini clique was planning to ruin the opening. There was a traditional antagonism between the cities of Northern and Southern Italy, and Puccini had been derided in the Roman press as a "flash-in-the-pan." To make matters



worse, there was considerable political unrest at the time caused by difficult economic conditions. King Umberto I had dissolved the parliament the previous summer and there had already been two attempts on his life. Queen Margherita and a number of government officials were to attend the premiere, and there were rumors of a possible assassination attempt.

Shortly before the curtain was to rise, the police approached Leopoldo Mugnone, the conductor, and informed him of a bomb threat. If a bomb were to go off, he was told to immediately have the orchestra play the national anthem. Needless to say, tensions ran high among the artists. Shortly after the opera began, there was an uproar in the house. Mugnone, fearing for his life, fled the pit, but it was only an argument between some late arrivals and other patrons who had already taken their seats. The opera began again and ran without further disturbance.

The audience received the work warmly, but the press was not wholly convinced. They uniformly admired Puccini's treatment of the subject, but thought the libretto gruesome and unsuited to the operatic stage. They also admitted that the tension surrounding the opening precluded a truly objective evaluation of the work.

However, the public literally went wild over *Tosca*. Puccini took his first bows after the tenor's first aria, which had to be repeated. *Tosca* was performed twenty more times that season at the Costanzi to sold-out opera houses. Within a year, *Tosca* had conquered all the major houses of Italy, beginning with La Scala under Arturo Toscanini and moved quickly to all the capitals of Europe and beyond.

Tosca's three main protagonists have proven to be pivotal roles in the careers of many great singers. Soprano Maria Jeritza was Puccini's favorite interpreter of the title role and was the first to deliver the famous second-act aria, "Vissi d'Arte" in a prone position. It has since become a convention to sing this aria from the floor. The great *Toscas* of this century have included Zinka Milanov, Renata Tebaldi and, perhaps the most famous soprano, Maria Callas, whose unerring sense of the stage made her interpretation of *Tosca* a legend. All the great tenors of the twentieth century have portrayed Cavaradossi — from Caruso to Domingo. Scarpia is a standard for many great baritones, the most famous of which was probably Tito Gobbi, renowned for his stage presence, who triumphed repeatedly in the role in the 1950's and 1960's.

Tosca has proven to be one of Puccini's most enduring achievements and has remained a mainstay of the repertoire of opera houses the world over.

Tosca: The Video (2011)

Starring Angela Gheorghiu, Jonas Kaufmann and Bryn Terfel; Antonio Pappano conducting



This Covent Garden recording of *Tosca* is created from performances on July 14 and 17 in 2011. They bring together three of the most intuitive talents and major opera stars on the planet. They are then melded under the baton of Antonio Pappano, who enhances every caress, swoon, and dramatic impulse of the opera. Here you have a recipe for the kind of evening that truly gives the Royal Opera its international status.

Angela Gheorghiu, as Flora *Tosca*, is the ultimate diva playing a diva — a fact that she acknowledges in her interviews and clearly relishes. She is an iconic artist with a beautiful voice and possesses a star quality that dazzles on stage. Jonas Kaufmann impresses with his deep, near-baritone Wagnerian voice, making Cavaradossi totally unlike any other Italian tenor performing the role.

Bryn Terfel is at his best, certainly looking the part with enough physical presence and steel in his vocal delivery to make the Chief of Police more than menacing and truly repulsive. By joining together these three superstars in this incredible production it was clear that opera history had been made.

This production of *Tosca* is the best of them all. The combination of an all-star cast, wonderful staging and sets, and superb sound and video make this a must-have for any opera lover. This is the one to watch again and again.