

A TRAGIC STORY OF PASSION & JEALOUSY

# TOSCA

GIACOMO PUCCINI · OCTOBER 18 & 20, 2024



## Audience Preview Guide

---

**Wednesday, October 16, 2024 -  
Student Night at the Opera**

**Friday, October 18, 2024**

**Sunday, October 20, 2024**

**Valentine Theatre**

---

*Toledo* OPERA

# Table of Contents

Setting and Characters .....	pg. 2
Synopsis.....	pg. 3
Puccini and Tosca .....	pg. 4
What to Listen For.....	pg. 5
In Puccini's Time .....	pg. 6
Post Opera Activities.....	pg. 7

## The Setting

Setting: Rome in June of 1800

## Characters

### TOSCA

By Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa

Floria Tosca, a celebrated singer

Mario Cavaradossi, a painter, Tosca's lover

Baron Scarpia, chief of police

Cesare Angelotti, friend of Cavaradossi

A Sacristan

Spoletta, a police agent

Sciarrone, a policeman

A Jailer

A Young Shepherd



Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome

## Synopsis

Setting: The plot takes place in Rome in the 1800 in the month of June.

### ACT I

Inside the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle, an escaped Roman prisoner, Cesare Angelotti, bursts through the doors seeking refuge. After he finds a place to hide within the private Attavanti Chapel, an old sacristan appears followed by the painter, Mario Cavaradossi. Mario picks up where he left off the day before and resumes painting a picture of Mary Magdalene. With blonde locks of hair, Mario's painting is based on Angelotti's sister, Marchesa Attavanti. Mario has never met the Marchesa, but he has seen her about town. As he paints, he takes a small statue of Floria Tosca, a singer and his lover, from his pocket to compare her beauty to that of his painting. After the sacristan mutters disapproval of the painting, he leaves. The escaped prisoner, Angelotti, emerges from his hiding place to speak with Mario. The two have been friends for quite some time and share similar political beliefs. Mario happily greets him and gives him food and drink before quickly pushing him back into hiding as Tosca can be heard approaching the chapel. Tosca is a jealous woman, and she takes no effort to hide it. She questions Mario about his faithfulness and love for her before reminding him of their planned rendezvous later that evening. It only takes one look of the painting to send Tosca into a fit of rage. She instantly recognizes the woman in Mario's painting as Marchesa Attavanti. After a bit of explaining and consoling, Mario is able to calm Tosca down. When she leaves the chapel, Angelotti reappears to tell Mario of his planned escape. Mid-explanation, cannons are heard in the distance signaling Angelotti's escape has been discovered. The two men quickly flee to Mario's villa. The sacristan reenters the church followed by a group of choristers that are to sing a Te Deum later that day. It isn't long until the chief of the secret police, Scarpia, and his men rush into the church. The old sacristan is questioned, but the officers are unable to get their answers. When Tosca enters the church again, Scarpia shows her a fan with the Attavanti family crest inscribed on it. Flying into another fit of jealousy, Tosca vows vengeance and rushes to Mario's villa to confront him with his lies. Scarpia, always suspicious of Mario, sends his men to follow Tosca. He then begins to craft a plan to kill Mario and have his way with Tosca.

### INTERMISSION

### ACT II

In Scarpia's apartment above the Farnese Palace that evening, Scarpia sets his plan into motion and sends a note to Tosca asking her to join him for dinner. Since Scarpia's men were not able to find Angelotti, they bring Mario in for questioning instead. Tosca can be heard singing downstairs as Mario is questioned. When Tosca arrives, Mario instructs her not to say anything before he is taken into another room for torture. Scarpia tells Tosca that she can save Mario from unimaginable pain if she agrees to tell him where Angelotti is hiding. For a while, Tosca remains strong and tells Scarpia nothing. However, when Mario's cries become louder and more desperate, she gives in and tells Scarpia their secret. When Mario is brought back into the room, he becomes furious after finding out Tosca had given Scarpia Angelotti's location. Suddenly, it's announced that Napoleon has won the battle at Marengo - a blow to Scarpia's side, and Mario shouts, "Victory!" Scarpia immediately seizes him and has his men throw him in prison. Finally alone with Tosca, Scarpia tells her she can save her lover's life if she agrees to give herself to him. Tosca breaks free from his advances and sings, "Vissi d'arte." Her whole life she has dedicated to art and love, and for what? To be rewarded with grief and misfortune? Tosca prays to the Lord. Spoletta, one of Scarpia's men, enters the room and tells him that Angelotti killed himself. Scarpia declares that Mario must be executed too unless Tosca gives in to his advances. If she does, Scarpia will stage a mock execution. Tosca finally agrees to the plan on the condition that he will provide safe passage for the two lovers to flee. Scarpia agrees and gives orders to Spoletta that the execution will be fake, before signing the contract the two have drafted. Spoletta shakes his head in acknowledgment and leaves. As Scarpia approaches her for an embrace, she takes out a knife she swiped from his dinner table and stabs him to death. After taking the signed document from his lifeless hands, she places candles next to his body and lays a crucifix on his chest.

### INTERMISSION

### ACT III

Early before sunrise in the Castel Sant'Angelo, Mario is told he has only one hour of life left. He refuses council with a priest and writes a letter to his beloved Tosca instead. Mario is unable to complete his letter due to a surge of emotion. Moments later Tosca rushes in to tell him all that has happened after he was taken away. Mario, overjoyed, sings to Tosca that her sweet and soft hands have had to kill a man for Mario's life. Tosca explains that the execution will be fake, but he must give a believable performance in order for them to escape freely. Mario is taken away and Tosca is left waiting impatiently. As the execution is carried out and the guns are fired, Mario falls to the ground. Tosca shouts out, happy with his flawless performance. Once everyone leaves, she rushes to Mario to hug him, overjoyed with the new life ahead of them. She tells him to hurry as they must flee town before Scarpia's body is discovered, but Mario does not move. When she bends down to him, she realizes he is dead. Scarpia has betrayed her from beyond the grave. Real bullets were used. Out of great heartbreak, she throws herself over his body and weeps. Cries are heard in the distance when Scarpia's body is discovered. Spoletta and a legion of officers swarm the castle to arrest Tosca. Tosca evades them, and with one last cry, hurls herself out of the castle and plummets to her death.



# Puccini and Tosca

Born in Lucca, Italy on December 22, 1858, Giacomo Puccini was expected to follow the family tradition as organist and choirmaster of the Cathedral of San Martino, which position had been held by members of the Puccini family for the previous four generations. However, at age sixteen, after attending a performance of Verdi's *Aida*, Puccini knew that his future lay beyond the confines of the organ loft. He recalled later, "When I heard *Aida* at Pisa, I felt that a musical window had been opened for me." In 1880, after receiving a scholarship instituted by Queen Margherita of Savoy, Puccini entered the Milan Conservatory, where he studied with Ponchielli, the famed composer of the opera *La Gioconda*.



**Giacomo Puccini**  
1858 - 1868

Near the end of his conservatory years, Puccini entered a one-act opera competition. Though his opera *Le Villi* did not even receive a mention, it was through this contest that Puccini's career as an opera composer was launched. Soon after, at a party in Milan at which the publisher Ricordi and the composer/librettist Boito were present, Puccini played and sang his opera to an enthusiastic crowd. Ricordi not only published *Le Villi*, but also commissioned another opera, *Edgar*, from Puccini, thus establishing a relationship that would continue until the composer's death.

When, in 1889, when *Edgar* was first performed, Puccini himself called the opera, "una cantonata" - "A blunder!" The libretto was abstruse, and even though Puccini extensively revised it after the premier, the opera has never entered the standard repertoire. Fortunately, with the continued support of Ricordi, and aided by a brilliant libretto, Puccini's next opera, *Manon Lescaut* achieved that greatest success of his career. This opera spread his name and reputation throughout Europe, prompting George Bernard Shaw to write in 1894, "Puccini looks to me more like the heir of Verdi than any of his rivals."

*La Bohème* followed quickly on the heels of *Manon Lescaut*, and though in 1896 it was not an immediate success, today many consider *La Bohème* Puccini's theatrical masterpiece. This opera marked the beginning of Puccini's collaboration with the poet-librettists Illica and Giacosa, which association Ricordi dubbed "the holy trinity!" Having found colleagues with whom he felt an artistic connection, Puccini engaged the poets' services for his next stage endeavor: the transforming of Victorien Sardou's play *La Tosca* into an opera.

As early as 1889, soon after the failure of *Edgar*, Puccini showed an interest in Sardou's *Tosca*, but it was not until

he saw a riveting performance of the play in 1895 with Sarah Bernhardt in the title role that he felt compelled to set this dramatic work to music. However, the composing rights to *Tosca* had been secured by Alberto Franchetti, a classmate of Puccini's during his time in Lucca. Ricordi was able to persuade Franchetti that *Tosca*, being far too violent and brutal, was not a suitable subject for an opera. Franchetti resigned the rights, and within twenty-four hours, they were acquired by Puccini!

In *Tosca*, Puccini demonstrated that he was capable of linking action to music through the use of Wagnerian-style leitmotifs - musical "calling cards" associated with a particular person, idea, or situation. From the outset of the opera, with the dark somber colors of the "Scarpia" motive, Puccini revealed a more heroic and grander style of composition, remarkably different from his earlier works. The intimate miniatures of *La Bohème* were replaced with larger theatrical gestures, reaching points of ecstasy. This music and this drama is more "cinematic" than what came before. In *Tosca*, Puccini realized his goal of creating a flexible musical style in which all elements are subordinate to the drama. The drama speaks directly through the music.

The first performance of *Tosca* took place at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome on January 14, 1900, in the presence of Queen Margherita, (the same who had awarded Puccini the scholarship to study at the Milan Conservatory years prior!). Rumors of an intended bombing by anarchists raised some disturbance during Act 1, but fortunately, this was caused by a group of latecomers trying to get into the performance! Calm was eventually restored, and the performance proceeded without any other interruptions.

To this day, *Tosca* remains one of the most popular and most performed of all operas. There are many reasons for this success: First, the dramatic action takes place on historically significant locations in Rome, (the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle, the Palazzo Farnese, and the Castel Sant'Angelo), during an historical event, (the Napoleonic Wars), over the span of a single day in June 1800. This compressed drama holds the attention of the audience from beginning to end. Second, there is a distinct sense of realism to the many of the musical effects employed by Puccini in the opera. His early experience as an organist can be heard in his setting of the "Te deum" at the end of Act 1, and even the character of the bustling Sacristan, who breaks off his work to pray the "Ave Maria," could have been based on any number of clerics at the Cathedral of San Martino! Desiring to capture the sound of the bells of Rome ringing the early morning Angelus at the beginning of Act 3, Puccini visited the city and stood on the ramparts of the Castel Sant'Angelo to hear the bells for himself, even going so far as to write the exact pitch of the largest bell of Saint Peter's Basilica into the score. Finally, *Tosca* retains its prominent position in the operatic canon because this piece evokes powerful emotions through beautifully inventive melodies and moments of great theater. Puccini carried the tradition of Italian opera forward from Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi into the modern era. How fortunate we are, one hundred years later, to inherit this tradition through the vibrant art of Maestro Puccini!

# What to Listen For

Though *Tosca* is filled with moments of melodrama and realism, these three arias give insight into the intimate thoughts of the characters who sing them and demonstrate Puccini's amazing gift of melody. Puccini once wrote, "without melody, fresh and poignant, there can be no music."

## ***Tre sbirri... Una carrozza... Te deum laudamus***

At the conclusion of Act I, Scarpia, the evil chief of police, gloats that he will soon possess *Tosca* while executing her lover Cavaradossi. The juxtaposition of this scheme with the choir and clergy of the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle singing a celebratory "Te deum" is a dramatic highpoint of the opera. Performed by Sir Bryn Terfel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeuYKIMfV4I>

## ***Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore***

In Act II, Scarpia offers to save Cavaradossi's life if *Tosca* agrees to give herself to him. Though she is repulsed by this proposal, after hearing the executioner's drums, she agrees, questioning why God has abandoned her at the time of her greatest need. Sung in concert by Mirella Freni.

<https://youtu.be/9QInFR6Pwrl?si=OFxWH9QYOLgqkUoS>

## ***E lucevan le stelle***

Shortly before he is to be executed, Cavaradossi writes a letter to his beloved *Tosca*, reminiscing on nights they spent together. He sings that his dream of love has vanished as he dies in despair. Performed by the great tenor Franco Corelli.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-RrG4sfdis>



Sant'Andrea della Valle, Rome



# In Puccini's Time

- 1858** Giacomo Puccini is born
- 1858** Queen Victoria telegraphs US President James Buchanan for the 1st time by transatlantic cable
- 1860** Abraham Lincoln makes a speech at Cooper Union in NYC that is largely responsible for his election
- 1863** President Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation to free slaves in US confederate states
- 1865** Abraham Lincoln is shot in Ford's Theatre and dies nine hours later
- 1868** Richard Wagner's *Meistersinger von Nuernberg* premieres in Munich
- 1871** James Weldon Johnson, American Harlem Renaissance poet, lyricist (*Lift Every Voice*) is born
- 1874** Johann Strauss Jr's operetta, *Die Fledermaus*, premieres in Vienna
- 1875** Georges Bizet's last and greatest opera, *Carmen*, premieres at the Opéra-Comique in Paris
- 1878** Thomas Edison is granted a patent for his cylinder phonograph
- 1882** Henrik Ibsen's play, *Ghosts*, premieres in Chicago
- 1884** *Le Villi*, Puccini's first opera, premieres at the Teatro Dal Verme
- 1885** Jerome Kern, American Broadway and film composer (*Showboat & Roberta*) born in New York City
- 1886** Statue of Liberty is dedicated by President Grover Cleveland, celebrated by 1st ticker NYC tape parade
- 1889** *Edgar* premieres at La Scala in Milan to a lukewarm reception
- 1890** Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh shoots himself and dies
- 1893** *Manon Lescaut* premieres at Teatre Regio in Turin
- 1896** *La Bohème* premieres in Turin
- 1897** First auto insurance policy in US issued by Travelers Insurance Company
- 1898** Paul Robeson, American bass baritone singer, actor, and civil rights activist is born in Princeton, NJ
- 1900** *Tosca* premieres in Rome
- 1901** United Kingdom's Queen Victoria dies after 63 years on the throne
- 1902** Enrico Caruso, Italian operatic tenor, becomes 1st well-known performer to make a record
- 1903** Puccini is badly injured in a car crash
- 1904** *Madama Butterfly* premieres at La Scala in Milan
- 1906** Willis Carrier receives a US patent for the world's first air conditioner
- 1907** Maria Montessori opens her 1st Montessori school, in Rome
- 1908** First American horror movie silent film, *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, premieres in Chicago
- 1909** Burl Ives, American folk singer (*Silver and Gold*), actor (snowman (*Rudolph*)), born in Hunt City, Illinois
- 1910** *La Fanciulla del West* premieres at the Metropolitan Opera in New York starring Enrico Caruso
- 1912** Girl Scouts begin in the US as the Girl Guides
- 1914** American Society of Composers, Authors, & Publishers (ASCAP) founded at Hotel Claridge in NYC
- 1916** Italian tenor Enrico Caruso records *O Solo Mio* for the Victor Talking Machine Company
- 1917** *La Rondine* premieres at Grand Théâtre de Monte Carlo
- 1918** *Il Trittico: Il Tabarro, Suor Angelica, and Gianni Schicchi* premiere in New York
- 1919** Nat King Cole, American jazz pianist & pop vocalist (*Unforgettable, Mona Lisa*) born in Montgomery, AL
- 1920** French heroine Joan of Arc is canonized as a saint by Pope Benedict XV
- 1921** Agatha Christie publishes her first novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* introducing Hercule Poirot
- 1922** US Supreme Court upholds 19th amendment to the US Constitution - women's right to vote
- 1924** Puccini dies from surgical complications of throat cancer.
- 1926** *Turandot* premieres at La Scala two years after Puccini's death. It was completed by Franco Alfano.

# Post-Opera Activities

## Activity 1: Women in Society

1. Floria Tosca is described as a devout young woman. Give examples from the opera of her deep religiosity. Can you find any examples in the plot that could dispute this description?
2. Floria Tosca's fatal flaw is her jealousy. Describe how Tosca's jealousy takes her down a dangerous path.
3. How do Mario Cavaradossi and Baron Scarpia manipulate Tosca for their own interests?
4. Floria Tosca makes desperate choices in the opera. Discuss other choices Tosca could have made. How would those choices have changed her fate? Would those choices have changed the fate of the other characters? Explain.

## Activity 2: Tosca Tunes

Historical romances, like *Bridgerton* and *Moulin Rouge*, use popular music to enhance the emotion and relatability for a modern audience. Choose one of the characters and create a contemporary soundtrack of at least three songs that complement the character and intensify their passions. Justify your songs for your chosen character, and explain how the songs intensify the plot:

- Cesare Angelotti
- Mario Cavaradossi
- Sacristan
- Floria Tosca
- Baron Scarpia
- Spoletta



## Activity 3: Tosca and Historical Context

While the opera *Tosca* is fictional, the backdrop of the narrative is rich in history, from the invasion of Napoleon to the famous sites around the city of Rome. Research one of these people/places/events, and explain how it is integrated into the plot:

- Napoleon's invasion of Italy (1796-1800)
- Pope Pius VI
- Pope Pius VII
- Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle
- Palazzo Farnese
- Castel Sant'Angelo
- The Alps