

*Virginia  
Opera*

**Tosca**  
*Puccini*

**STUDY GUIDE**

**2008-2009 SEASON**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<i>Tosca</i> Plot Overview	3
Principal Characters in the Opera	3
Detailed Story Narrative	4
Meet the Composer: Giacomo Puccini	7
Puccini and the Verismo School	9
The Origin of <i>Tosca</i>	11
Meet the Librettist	12
The Politics of <i>Tosca</i>	13
The Music of <i>Tosca</i>	14
Discussion Questions	15
A Short History of Opera	16
The Operatic Voice	17
Opera Production	19

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## PLOT OVERVIEW

In 1800, the city of Rome was a virtual police state. The ruling Bourbon monarchy was threatened by agitators advocating political and social reform: the Republicans, inspired to freedom and democracy by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and Napoleon, opposed the Royalists who advocated the continuation of the existing monarchy.

Mario Cavaradossi, a painter and ardent Republican sympathizer, aids an escaped fugitive, Cesare Angelotti, imprisoned because of his Republican sympathies. Baron Scarpia, the Roman chief of police, suspects Cavaradossi's complicity in concealing Angelotti and arrests him.

Cavaradossi is in love with the renowned singer, Floria Tosca: Scarpia also desires Tosca. Scarpia tortures Cavaradossi in the presence of Tosca, and she then discloses Angelotti's whereabouts. Afterwards, Scarpia condemns Cavaradossi to execution.

To save her lover, Tosca agrees to submit to the lustful Scarpia in exchange for their safe passage from Rome. Scarpia orders a mock execution for Cavaradossi, after which Tosca murders Scarpia.

Cavaradossi is killed when real bullets are fired at his execution. Scarpia's police arrive to arrest Tosca, but she escapes them, and leaps over the parapet to her death.

## PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE OPERA

Floria Tosca, a celebrated singer	Soprano (Lyric, Spinto, or Dramatic)
Mario Cavaradossi, a painter	Tenor (Lyric)
Scarpia, Roman police chief	Bass-baritone or Dramatic Baritone
Cesare Angelotti, a former Roman Consul	Bass
A Sacristan	Bass (Buffo)
Spoletta, a police agent	Tenor
Sciarrone, a police agent	Baritone
Jailer	Bass
Shepherd Boy	Boy Soprano

Soldiers, police agents, noblemen and women, townsfolk,  
artisans, cardinal, judge, scribe, officers, sergeant.

TIME and PLACE: June 1800, Rome

## DETAILED STORY NARRATIVE

### *ACT I: The Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle in Rome*

*Tosca* begins without prelude or overture. The fugitive, Cesare Angelotti, breathless and exhausted, seeks refuge in his family's Attavanti chapel inside the church. Angelotti is a descendant of a noble Roman patrician family, however, his Republican sympathies led to his imprisonment by the Royalists. His escape was engineered by his sister, the Marchesa Attavanti, who succeeded by bribing the jailer. The Marchesa has left food and clothing for her brother in the chapel. Angelotti searches frantically for the chapel key concealed in a shrine, finds it, and then slips into the chapel to hide.

The Sacristan enters the church carrying a bundle of paintbrushes, grumbling as he washes them for the painter, Mario Cavaradossi. Mario Cavaradossi arrives to work on his painting: the Holy Virgin slaying a serpent. The model for his Madonna figure was the Marchesa Attavanti, unaware that Cavaradossi captured her image when she had been visiting the Attavanti chapel to hide provisions for her soon-to-be fugitive brother, Angelotti.

Cavaradossi admires his painting, and reflects on the dissimilarities between his painted Madonna (the Marchesa) and his beloved Floria Tosca, noting the blonde, blue-eyed features of his painted Madonna and the more Mediterranean, dark beauty of Tosca.

Angelotti emerges from hiding. Cavaradossi recognizes his old friend, and both reminisce about their shared political sympathies. A voice is heard approaching: it is Tosca, and Cavaradossi abruptly sends Angelotti back into the chapel.

Tosca enters, a woman possessed with obsessive jealousy and profound religiosity: she becomes agitated, irritated, and suspicious, believing that she heard Cavaradossi talking to a woman. She immediately interrogates Cavaradossi. Tosca, a woman of fierce passions, furiously accuses Cavaradossi of betraying their love.

Tosca's irrational jealousy and suspicion are further inflamed when she recognizes that the woman in Cavaradossi's painting is the Marchesa Attavanti: a beautiful woman with blue eyes and blonde hair. She urges Cavaradossi to alter the image and change its hair and eyes to those of Tosca: dark hair and brown eyes.

Cavaradossi diverts her obsession with the painting with reassurances of his profound love for her, and the lovers plan to rendezvous at Cavaradossi's villa after Tosca's evening performance. Tosca and Cavaradossi express their ardent passion for each other. With hesitation, Tosca apologizes for her jealous outburst and begs forgiveness.

After Tosca departs, Angelotti emerges from hiding. A cannon shot from the Castel Sant'Angelo announces that a prisoner has escaped. Fearing the police, Cavaradossi gives Angelotti a key to his villa, advising him that in the event of danger, he is to hide in the garden well.

The Sacristan arrives with news that Napoleon has been defeated by the Austrians at Marengo. (The news is erroneous: in the battle between the French and Austrians, the French general, Melas, lost his life: afterwards, the French rallied and were victorious.)

The Sacristan and Choir boys celebrate the presumed Austrian victory, but they are suddenly interrupted by the unexpected entrance of Baron Scarpia and his police agents: three crashing chords announce the entrance of the autocratic police chief; afterwards, a sudden, fearful hush envelops the scene.

Scarpia's first words rebuke the Sacristan and Choir boys for boisterously desecrating the sacred atmosphere of the church. When Scarpia discovered Angelotti's empty cell at the Castel Sant'Angelo, he arrested the jailer, tortured him, and learned of the Marchesa Attavanti's complicity in helping Angelotti escape. Scarpia has pursued Angelotti to the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle, his ruthless detective instincts assuring him that Angelotti would take refuge in his family's chapel.

Scarpia orders his men to search for clues. In the chapel, they find a basket of provisions and a fan bearing the Attavanti crest with a portrait of the Marchesa. In Angelotti's haste to leave the chapel, he was

careless and left the fan behind: the fan was part of his camouflage, since he was to escape in woman's disguise. Scarpia is now convinced that Angelotti took refuge in the chapel. But, he has disappeared.

Tosca returns to the church, seeking Cavaradossi. She has come to cancel their plans to rendezvous at his villa, because in celebration of Napoleon's supposed defeat, she must perform a Cantata that evening in the garden of the Palazzo Farnese.

Scarpia suspects the painter Cavaradossi's complicity in Angelotti's escape, and he intends to prey on Tosca, using her jealousy to incite her to betray both Cavaradossi and Angelotti. Scarpia will use the fan with the Marchesa Attavanti's portrait to inflame Tosca's jealousy.

Scarpia inflames Tosca with doubt and suspicion, implying that the Marchesa is Cavaradossi's lover, and that they have escaped together to Cavaradossi's villa. Tosca, convinced that she has been betrayed, rushes off to Cavaradossi's villa to confront the lovers, unaware that Scarpia, has three of his agents follow her.

The faithful prepare for the *Te Deum*. The sacred processional music surges and swells as the church fills with humble and devoted worshippers, a Swiss guard, the Cardinal and his entourage, and choristers and priests.

While the passions of the *Te Deum* intensify, Scarpia reveals his true passions and gloats on his prospects: he wants Angelotti's head, death to his rival Cavaradossi, and the conquest of Tosca. Scarpia kneels in prayer and vows: "Tosca, to possess you, I would forsake God."

## ***Act II: Scarpia's apartment in the Palazzo Farnese***

Scarpia dines alone in his apartment, while below in the garden, festivities celebrate the presumed Austrian victory over Napoleon. Scarpia provides a gloating revelation of his evil soul, admitting pride in his lechery and monstrous depravity. Scarpia's henchman, Spoletta, informs him that their search was fruitless, and they found no signs of Angelotti at Cavaradossi's villa. However, they did apprehend the painter Cavaradossi, and have brought him to the Palazzo Farnese.

Scarpia summons Cavaradossi to his chamber for questioning. As Scarpia ferociously interrogates Cavaradossi, from the courtyard below, Tosca is heard singing the Cantata. Defiantly, Cavaradossi denies any knowledge about the whereabouts of Angelotti.

After the Cantata, Tosca arrives at Scarpia's apartment, having accepted his invitation so she could learn the whereabouts of Cavaradossi. But she becomes immediately confused and troubled when she sees Cavaradossi. Scarpia decides that Tosca is to remain with him while Cavaradossi is brought to an adjoining room and tortured into a confession: Scarpia is convinced that Tosca will be unable to bear Cavaradossi's suffering and pain, and then she will reveal the whereabouts of Angelotti.

The tension becomes intolerable. Tosca cannot endure her lover's pain, and to save him, she betrays Angelotti's hiding place to Scarpia, telling Scarpia that Angelotti hides in the well at Cavaradossi's villa. Tosca has betrayed Cavaradossi, but it was an act of love, Scarpia halts the brutal and sadistic torture, and Cavaradossi is brought back into Scarpia's chambers, bruised and bleeding.

Scarpia's henchman, Sciarrone, brings news that the Royalist victory at Marengo was a mistake: Napoleon had indeed been victorious over the Austrians. Cavaradossi, weak and in excruciating pain, rises and explodes into a patriotic outburst of victory, revealing for the first time that he is an ardent revolutionary and Republican sympathizer. Helping the fugitive Angelotti was a crime against the state, but Scarpia had no conclusive proof against Cavaradossi. Now, Cavaradossi has avowed treason, and Scarpia immediately arrests him and sends him off to jail and execution.

Now alone with Tosca, Scarpia sarcastically laments his unfinished supper. Tosca faces her dilemma: her desperation to save her lover. She tries to negotiate with Scarpia, believing that she can buy Cavaradossi's freedom. She asks Scarpia *quanto*, "How much to save Mario?" "Money!" Scarpia replies, "Tosca, I want you!" If Cavaradossi is to be freed, Tosca will be his prize. Scarpia can no longer contain his desire for Tosca: he reveals that he is consumed and possessed by his passion for her, telling her that he has

long admired her beauty, and that tonight he has become so deeply stirred that his obsession is uncontrollable. As Tosca pleads for mercy, Scarpia proceeds from persuasion to physical action. Suddenly, Tosca is struck with terror as she hears ominous drum rolls outside, indicating that the gallows are being erected for an execution: it will be Cavaradossi's execution.

Tosca is disgusted with herself for having to negotiate with the insidious Scarpia, but in her desperation to save Cavaradossi, she finds no alternative but to agree to yield to Scarpia, however, Scarpia must pardon Cavaradossi and give them both a safe conduct pass out of Rome. Scarpia does not have the power to pardon Cavaradossi, so he contrives an alternative: he orders a mock execution; instead of the gallows for Cavaradossi, there will be a firing squad with blanks in their rifles.

While Scarpia writes their safe-conduct pass, Tosca, noticing a letter opener - or knife - at the corner of Scarpia's desk, surreptitiously seizes and hides it. In a moment of terror and confusion, she conceives the idea to murder Scarpia. The intensity of the orchestra music narrates her thoughts: Tosca is in a conflict, caught between Scarpia's lust and her profound love for Cavaradossi. In a moment of uncontrollable passion she decides to protect herself and redeem the world from Scarpia's evil.

As Scarpia rises from his desk and advances toward Tosca, he shouts victoriously, "Tosca, you are finally mine!" As he attempts to embrace her, Tosca plunges the knife into Scarpia's heart and says, "This is Tosca's kiss that you have so passionately longed for."

While Scarpia lies dead on the floor, clutching the safe conduct pass, Tosca extracts the pass from his hand and then reverentially places candlesticks and a crucifix around his corpse.

In horror, Tosca views Scarpia lying dead before her, and with religious solemnity forgives the dead Scarpia for his sins, reciting an ironic epitaph to him: "And in front of him, all Rome trembled."

### ***ACT III: Castel Sant'Angelo***

Cavaradossi is in jail awaiting execution. His last wish is to write a farewell letter to his beloved Tosca: "The stars were shining." Cavaradossi then reflects on his despair and melancholy as he faces his forthcoming execution.

Tosca arrives, unrepentant and triumphant. She produces their safe-conduct pass and explains to a suspicious Cavaradossi the details of how she obtained it. She tells Cavaradossi that she murdered Scarpia; they are avenged; and he is to act out a mock execution. The couple exult in their forthcoming freedom, and Cavaradossi praises Tosca's beautiful hands that have changed their destiny.

Cavaradossi is led before the firing squad, and they fire the fatal shots. Tosca watches from the side, sees Cavaradossi fall, and rejoices with pride that her lover has acted so well; ironically, she exclaims "How well he acts." After the firing squad departs, Tosca approaches Cavaradossi and urges him to rise. In shock, the awful reality overcomes her, as she realizes that she is addressing a lifeless body: Scarpia betrayed his promise; Cavaradossi has been murdered.

Policemen race to find Tosca, their prime suspect in the murder of Scarpia. Tosca avoids them, and runs to the edge of the parapet. Before she leaps to her death, Tosca addresses her final words to the dead Scarpia: "Scarpia, God will be our final judge."

## MEET THE COMPOSER: GIACOMO PUCCINI

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) was the heir to Italy's cherished opera icon, Giuseppe Verdi: he became the last champion of the great Italian Romantic opera tradition, in which lyricism, melody, and the vocal arts dominated the art form.

Puccini came from a family of musicians who for generations had been church organists and composers in his native Lucca, Italy, a part of the Tuscany region. His operatic epiphany occurred when he heard a performance of Verdi's *Aida*: at that moment the 18 year old, budding composer became inspired toward a future in opera. With aid from Queen Margherita of Italy that was supplemented by additional funds from a great uncle, he progressed to the Milan Conservatory, where he eventually studied under Amilcare Ponchielli, a renowned musician, teacher, and the composer of *La Gioconda* (1876).

In Milan, Ponchielli became his mentor, astutely recognizing his extraordinarily rich orchestral and symphonic imagination, and his remarkable harmonic and melodic inventiveness, resources that would become the hallmarks and signature characteristics of Puccini's mature compositional style.

Puccini's early experiences served to elevate his acute sense of drama, which eventually became engraved in his operatic works. He was fortunate to have been exposed to a wide range of dramatic plays that were presented in his hometown by distinguished touring companies: works by Vittorio Alfieri, Carlo Goldoni, the French works of Alexandre Dumas', father and son, as well as those of the extremely popular Victorien Sardou.

In 1884, at the age of 26, Puccini competed in the publisher Sonzogno's one-act opera contest with his lyric stage work, *Le Villi*, "The Witches," a phantasmagoric romantic tale about abandoned young women who die of lovesickness; musically and dramatically, *Le Villi* remains quite a distance from the poignant sentimentalism which later became Puccini's trademark. *Le Villi* lost the contest, but La Scala agreed to produce the opera for its following season. But more significantly to Puccini's future career, Giulio Ricordi, the influential publisher, recognized the young composer's talent to write musical drama, and lured him from his competitor, Sonzogno.

Puccini became Ricordi's favorite composer, a status that developed into much peer envy, resentment, and jealousy among his rivals, as well as from Ricordi's chief publishing competitor, Sonzogno. Nevertheless, Ricordi used his ingenious golden touch to unite composers and librettists, and he proceeded to assemble the best poets and dramatists for his budding star, Puccini.

Ricordi commissioned Puccini to write a second opera, *Edgar* (1889), a melodrama involving a rivalry between two brothers for a seductive Moorish woman that erupts into powerful passions of betrayal and revenge. Its premiere at La Scala became a disappointment: the critics praised Puccini's orchestral and harmonic advancement from *Le Villi*, but considered the work mediocre; even its later condensation from four acts to three acts could not redeem or improve its fortunes.

Ricordi's faith in his young protégé was triumphantly vindicated by the immediate success of Puccini's next opera, *Manon Lescaut* (1893). The genesis of the libretto was itself an operatic melodrama, saturated with feuds and disagreements between its considerable group of writers who included Ruggiero Leoncavallo, Luigi Illica, Giuseppe Giacosa, Domenico Oliva, Marco Praga, and even Giulio Ricordi himself. The critics and public were unanimous in their praise of Puccini's third opera, and in London, the eminent critic, George Bernard Shaw, noted that in *Manon Lescaut*, "Puccini looks to me more like the heir of Verdi than any of his rivals."

For Puccini's librettos over the next decade, Ricordi secured for him the illustrious team of the scenarist, Luigi Illica, and the poet, playwright, and versifier, Giuseppe Giacosa. The first fruit of their collaboration became *La Bohème* (1896), drawn from Henri Murger's picaresque novel about life among the artists of the Latin Quarter in Paris during the 1830s: *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*.

The critics were strangely cool at *La Bohème*'s premiere, several of them finding it a restrained work when compared to the inventive passion and ardor of *Manon Lescaut*. But in spite of negative reviews, the

public eventually became enamored with the opera, and it would only be in Vienna, where Mahler, hostile to Puccini, virtually banned *La Bohème* in favor of Leoncavallo's treatment of the same subject.

After *La Bohème*, Puccini proceeded to transform Victorien Sardou's play, *La Tosca* (1887), into a sensational, powerful, and thrilling musical action drama, improving on his literary source and providing immortality to its dramatist.

His next opera was an adaptation of David Belasco's one-act play, *Madam Butterfly* (1904). At its premiere, the opera experienced what Puccini described as "a veritable lynching," the audience's hostility and denunciation of the composer and his work apparently deliberately engineered by rivals who were jealous of Puccini's success and favored status with Ricordi. Nevertheless, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* quickly joined its two predecessors as cornerstones of the contemporary operatic repertory.

Puccini followed with *La Fanciulla del West* (1910), "The Girl of the West," *La Rondine* (1917), the three one-act operas of *Il Trittico – Suor Angelica*, *Gianni Schicchi* and *Il Tabarro* (1918), and his final work, *Turandot* (1926), the latter completed posthumously by Franco Alfano under the direction of Arturo Toscanini.

## PUCCINI AND THE VERISMO SCHOOL

Puccini's musical and dramatic style reflects the naturalistic movement of the *giovane scuola*, the "young school," a late nineteenth century Italian artistic genre called *verismo*, or Realism: these works emphasized swift dramatic action, and were thematically concentrated on raw human nature in their portrayal of the conflicts and tensions of everyday life. Throughout his career, Puccini identified himself with *verismo*: what he called the *stile mascagnano*, the Mascagni style first successfully portrayed in *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890).

In the Realism genre - *verismo* - no subject was too mundane, no subject was too harsh, and no subject was too ugly; therefore, the plots dealt with hot and heavy passions: sex, seduction, revenge, betrayal, jealousy, murder, and death (the plot of *Tosca*). In *verismo*, primal passions became the subject of the action: it portrayed the latent animal, the uncivilized savage, and the barbarian, dark side of man's soul; an artistic confirmation of Darwin's theory that man evolved from primal beast. In Realism and its successors, modernity and film noire, man is portrayed as irrational, brutal, crude, cruel, and demonic: *Tosca's* Baron Scarpia.

In Realism, death became the consummation of desire. And in Realism, good does not necessarily triumph over evil. In the genre, Enlightenment's reason and Romanticism's freedom and sentimentality were overturned: man became viewed as a creature of instinct. In the genre of *verismo*, *Tosca* is perhaps its most quintessential representation.

Puccini wrote tonal music in the diatonic (whole tone) scale, but within that framework, his style has a strongly personal lyrical signature that is readily identifiable: lush melodies, unresolved dissonances, and daring harmonic and instrumental colors; his writing endows both his vocal and orchestral works with a soft suppleness, elegance, gentleness, as well as a poignancy.

In all of Puccini's operas, leitmotifs, or melodic fragments that identify persons or ideas, play a prominent role in providing cohesion, emotion, and reminiscence; however, they are never developed to the systematic symphonic grandeur of Wagner, and are utilized and exploited solely for their dramatic effect.

Puccini's dramatic instincts never failed him, and he was truly a master stage-craftsman who possessed a consummate knowledge of the demands of the stage, and a pronounced feeling for theatrical effects; like Wagner, he was concerned to integrate his music, words, and gestures into a single conceptual unity. A perfect example of Puccini's acute stage genius occurs in the roll call of the prostitutes in *Manon Lescaut*, and in the *Te Deum* in *Tosca*.

Just like Bellini's *I Puritani*, the music associated with Puccini's heroines, their motive, is generally heard before the heroines themselves are seen: a brilliant dramatic technique evidenced in the entrances of *Tosca*, *Butterfly*, *Manon Lescaut*, and *Mimi*.

Puccini had a rare gift for evoking ambience: the bells in Act III of *Tosca*, or the ship's sirens in *Il Tabarro*. In *La Bohème*, he musically injected realistic and minute details of everyday life: the music underscoring Rodolfo's manuscript being burned in the fire; the sound effects from Colline tumbling down the hall; Schaunard's horn; Colline's coat; Mimi's bonnet; and the falling snowflakes at the start of Act III. Debussy, no friend to the contemporary school of Italian opera, was prompted to confess to Paul Dukas that he knew of no one who had described the Paris of the age of Louis-Philippe "as well as Puccini in *La Bohème*."

Puccini, with the exception of his last opera, *Turandot*, was not a composer of ambitious works or grand opera, those stage spectacles in the manner of Meyerbeer, Auber, Verdi, or Wagner. He commented that "the only music I can make is of small things," acknowledging that his talent and temperament were not suited to works of large design, spectacle, or portrayals of romantic heroism.

Therefore, Puccini's opera world does not deal with kings, nobles, gods, or heroes, but rather, with a realism that portrays simple, ordinary people, and the countless little humdrum details of their everyday lives. Certainly, in *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini's epitomizes his world of "small things," their grandeur not of supercharged passions evolving from world-shattering events, but rather from moments of tender, poignant lyrical emotion and pathos. And amidst the spectacle of his last opera,

*Turandot*, his characterization of Liù - a character he invented for the story - possesses that typical Puccinian pathos. Ultimately, in the writing of dramas filled with tenderness, beauty, and emotion, Puccini had no equals, and few equals in inventing a personal lyricism that portrayed intimate humanity with sentimentalism.

Puccini's writing for both voice and orchestra is rich and elegant. His supreme talent was his magic for inventive melody, which he expressed in combinations of outstanding instrumental coloration and harmonic texture: a signature that is so individual that it is recognized immediately. His memorable arias are endlessly haunting, and it has been said that you leave a Puccini opera performance, but the music never leaves you.

## THE ORIGIN OF *TOSCA*

Victorien Sardou was a renowned French dramatist as well as librettist: he was born in Paris in 1831, and died in 1908. In many of Sardou's plays, his style followed in the footsteps of Scribe and Beaumarchais: his works were mostly satirical comedies that scorned contemporary social and political issues of his day.

Sardou was also an astute and meticulous amateur historian, writing passionate and tragic melodramas that were usually set against a background of war or rebellion: *Patrie!* (1869), *La Haine* (1874), *Théodora* (1884) and of course, *La Tosca* (1887). His dramatic stage works inspired some 25 operas, among the many, Giordano's *Fedora* and *Madame Sans-Gêne*, Saint-Saëns's *Les Barbares*, Offenbach's *Le Roi Carotte*, and Bizet's unfinished *Grisélidis*.

Sardou became a champion of late nineteenth-century literary naturalism, or Realism, in the same mold as Prosper Mérimée, the original literary source for Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), and Giovanni Verga, the literary source for Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1892). Realism – *verisme* in French, *verismo* in Italian – was a profound dramatic contrast to Romanticism's sentimentalism and noble ideals that dealt with the underbelly of life, portraying man as barbaric and cruel. The music critic, George Bernard Shaw, writing at the time under the pseudonym *Corno di Bassetto*, was prompted to coin his synonym for Sardou's melodramatic realism: *sardoodledom*.

Sardou wrote the stage play *La Tosca* for the then reigning diva, or goddess of the theatrical stage, Sarah Bernhardt - then age 45. His play was a supreme theatrical and dramatic success, which had over 3000 performances in France alone. Sardou's *La Tosca* portrayed the genre of realism to the core; it was a brutal and savage melodrama saturated with sadism, cruelty, and murder.

## MEET THE LIBRETTISTS

Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa proceeded to ingeniously capture the dramatic power of Sardou's play, a play that was cumbersome in its original five-act configuration: their ultimate challenge was to transform the drama into operatic proportions, in the end, reducing it to three power-packed acts.

Giacosa (1847 – 1906) was a lawyer turned playwright, and by the turn of the century, was regarded as Italy's leading playwright. His earlier association with Puccini was his participation with the libretto team for *Manon Lescaut*, and as Illica's partner in the writing of *La Bohème*. For *La Bohème*, Giacosa is credited with astutely contrasting the characterization of the two female leads, Mimi and Musetta, an important dramatic aspect that seems to have eluded Leoncavallo in his treatment of the same subject.

Illica (1857 - 1919) had many successes as a playwright. His 35 librettos represented an eclectic potpourri of contemporary literary fashions: his scenarios included *verismo*, historical drama, art nouveau symbolism, evocations of the *commedia dell'arte*, and even an adaptation of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. But Illica's particular skill was in creating scenes that sustained the dynamism of the action: he is credited with creating the dramatic roll-call of the prostitutes in *Manon Lescaut*, the Café Momus scene in *La Bohème*, and in *Andrea Chénier*, which he wrote for Giordano, the parade of the People's Representatives in the second act. Illica also participated in the much tormented and tortured libretto for Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, a libretto that eventually evolved from the contributions of a succession of poets and dramatists, including Ricordi himself.

For *Tosca*, Illica drafted the scenario and Giacosa versified the dialogue by converting it into polished verse, the latter continually arguing and protesting that he was saturated with too much plot. Puccini, an obsessive perfectionist who was always integrally involved with plot and dramatic details, became a brutal taskmaster, but in spite of continuing tension and conflict, as well as Giacosa's melodramatic series of threats to withdraw from the collaboration, the team of Illica and Giacosa finally succeeded in completing their second full libretto for Puccini, delivering the text of *Tosca* to the composer in early 1898.

## THE POLITICS OF *TOSCA*

*Tosca's* story deals with authentic politics and true historical events. In order to fully grasp the essence of the drama, a knowledge of the history of the period is essential.

The story takes place in Rome in the year 1800. The city provides a fascinating glimpse of its paradoxes: there is pervasive religiosity; there is violence and bigotry erupting from political turmoil; sheep still graze in the Forum, and blood pours from the executioner's scaffold that stands in the Piazza del Popolo.

In 1800, Europe is embedded in political turmoil and social upheaval: the ideals of democracy, freedom, and reform border on revolution. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment gave birth to new ideals for humanity's progress and correcting social injustices: the literary works of Rousseau, Voltaire, Locke, and Jefferson. And the French and American Revolutions had awakened Europe to a new humanism that it was hoped would ultimately signal the end of human oppression and tyranny: the *ancien régime* and autocracies. The ruling European monarchies were deemed the oppressors and causes of all human oppression, and Napoleon, perceived as the savior for the masses of society, was resolved to destroy them. Nevertheless, there remained a great disparity between the dominators and the dominated.

Italy was a microcosm of Europe's early nineteenth-century political turmoil: a patchwork of city-states not yet unified, and its population longing for independence from the oppressive rule of the Austrian Hapsburg monarchy, remnants of the Bourbon French monarchy in Naples, and the Papacy. Rome was ruled as a tyrannical police state under the control of the Kingdom of Naples: the Bourbon King Ferdinand IV and his wife, Maria Carolina, the latter, the sister of Marie Antoinette who had been beheaded a few years earlier.

In Rome, there was a heated conflict between two political factions, Republicans and Royalists, that was approaching civil war. The Republicans advocated the liberation of Italy, in effect, reform and the institution of the Enlightenment ideals of human rights, freedom, and democracy. Republican hopes for liberation from tyranny resided with the French and Napoleon.

The Royalists advocated the preservation of the European monarchies. To Royalists, the ideals of democracy were considered anathema and treachery against the state: democratic ideals would eliminate their power. The Royalists initiated an oppressive cleansing action against all opposition: Republicans, liberals, anti Royalists, anti-monarchist, and supporters of Napoleon.

## THE MUSIC OF *TOSCA*

Musically, Puccini uses leitmotifs in *Tosca* extensively; nevertheless, those musical references to objects, persons or ideas are not developed on a Wagnerian scale, and are certainly not woven into a symphonic web.

Puccini's musical motives serve as a narrator and provide information about a character's unexpressed thoughts, recollection, or recall. In Act I, Tosca and Cavaradossi plan their rendezvous that evening, but Cavaradossi's thoughts are revealed when Angelotti's fugitive motive is heard. Likewise, Scarpia's interrogation of Cavaradossi is punctuated by the motif connoting the well: Cavaradossi refuses to mention the well, but the music reveals that he is thinking about it.

Opera, because it speaks on the two levels of words and music, can provide powerful and potent dramatic emphasis. The irony of good and evil presented in the *Te Deum* scene is a quintessential example of the art form's great capacity to reveal truth: against the solemn, sacred *Te Deum*, Scarpia speaks blasphemy: he vows that to possess Tosca, he would forsake God.

In *Tosca's* finale, the orchestra thunders the music from Cavaradossi's farewell: *e lucevan le stelle*. But specifically, it is the music that underscores his final lamenting words in the aria: *e non ho amato mai tanto la vita*, "Never have I loved life so much as in this moment."

In Puccini's musical hands, the tragedy of this story is the death of love and the death of lovers; a poignant statement from a supreme master of music drama.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## History

1. The action in Tosca takes place in many famous locations in Rome. Research the 1) Date of construction, 2) Purpose of structure, 3) Current condition, 4) Unique aspects of the structure for the Colosseum, Pantheon, the Forum, the Spanish Steps, the Catacombs and the Baths.
2. The opera takes place during 1800, which was a time of major political unrest in Italy. There was also major political unrest during the 1900's in Italy. Discuss the political changes in Italy during the 1900's and rise and fall of fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini.

## Geography

3. The Roman Empire was once the most powerful force in the world. Using a current world map, research and list which countries (or parts of countries) were once a part of the Roman Empire.

## Government

4. Ancient Rome was the birthplace of many important political ideas. What were some of the major political ideas developed in ancient Rome? Are any of these ideas still used today?

## Science

5. The Ancient Romans were scientifically a very advanced society. What were some of their most important contributions to science? Do we still use some of their discoveries?





# The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, and Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving a unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<b><i>Soprano</i></b>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<b><i>Mezzo-Soprano</i></b>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)
<b><i>Tenor</i></b>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<b><i>Baritone</i></b>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Marriage of Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	<b><i>Verdi Baritone</i></b> Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<b><i>Bass</i></b>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<b><i>Buffo Bass</i></b> Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	<b><i>Basso Cantate</i></b> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

# Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.

