

A woman with long dark hair and red lipstick, wearing a black lace dress, is positioned on the left side of the frame. In the background, a statue of the Angel of Victory is illuminated with a warm, golden light. The overall scene is set against a dark, atmospheric background with a hint of a cityscape silhouette on the right.

TOSCA

BY GIACOMO PUCCINI

<https://sfopera.ihubapp.org/c/fidelio-2021/feed?postTypeId=whatsNew>

<https://sfopera.ihubapp.org/posts/84765/note-from-the-general-director>



A Note from Matthew Shilvock

“To stop the flow of music would be like the stopping of time itself, incredible and inconceivable.”

So wrote Aaron Copland in 1959 in an essay entitled “The Pleasures of Music.” I have come back to that now-prescient sentence many times over the last 18 months. What was inconceivable—the stopping of music—suddenly became real in a way quite unique in history.

Disasters don’t generally stop the flow of music. Quite the contrary. Think of Judy Garland singing for the troops in World War II, or the exuberance of big band jazz during the Depression. Even the Titanic went down with a chamber group playing on deck. During the 1918 Spanish Flu, musical shutdowns, if they happened at all, lasted generally just for [a few weeks](#) given indisposed performers. Music typically brings us together in times of adversity. It lets us find common ground. It gives us a rhythm, a pacing, a purpose, an escape.

So, this eighteen-month shutdown of live music has been singular in occurrence and singularly painful in impact. So many of us have sought out any musical outlet to nourish our creative

hunger. Our orchestral musicians put together chamber concerts outdoors. I found myself desperate to curate and share music through Spotify playlists. We seized the very first opportunity we could to make live music in Marin with our drive-in *Barber of Seville* in April. It was as though time really had stopped and we knew that finding ways to create, perform and experience music was the only way forward.



We are now at that moment when music is flowing once again, and propulsive energy is returning. For weeks now we have been in rehearsals, and we have relished the layers of chorus, soloists and orchestra being added one by one. But what is fascinating is how different music feels now. Each time I hear a new layer added, I well up in emotion at what those new vibrations now mean. It is as though I am hearing music for the first time and finding new truth in it.

The importance of San Francisco Opera opening with *Tosca* has been oft-stated given its opening/re-opening credentials here in 1932 and 1997. But *Tosca* is also emotionally important for our return—important for artists and audiences alike. *Tosca* coalesces the dramatic and lyrical possibilities of opera into a piece of unwavering emotional conviction. It hurtles together extremes of the human condition: the sacred and profane, duty and survival, fear and hope. In *Tosca* we experience the vastness of humanity in the blink of an eye and, as such, it is the perfect opera to reconnect with our shared humanity, and what unites us, after such separation.

Tosca is also a tremendous opera to showcase the Company, silent for far too long. As the curtain rises we find ourselves, together, in artistic synergy once again. The rich sonorities of the

orchestra, the collective power of the chorus, the impassioned lyricism of the soloists, and the extraordinary skill of the backstage personnel, all unfolding under the transformative leadership of our new music director, Eun Sun Kim, and our insightful stage director, Shawna Lucey. With this *Tosca* we begin a new era of discovery and excellence—a new era in which we will all, together, chart new musical paths forward.

Let us hope that the flow of music is never stopped again. Let us find collective reverence for what it means to be surrounded anew by music. Every note propels us forward. Every note marks a new moment of truth that has just been illuminated. Time is no longer stopped.

*And the stars were shining,
And the earth was scented.
The gate of the garden creaked
And a footstep grazed the sand.
Fragrant, she entered
And fell into my arms.*

Cavaradossi, “E lucevan le stelle”, *Tosca* Act III

<https://sfopera.ihubapp.org/posts/84377/tosca-at-a-glance>

At a Glance

The plot of *Tosca* is as thrilling as it is *au courant*, a tale of power and lust and the inevitable fallout when they clash. The powerful Baron Scarpia, Rome's chief of police, is determined to suppress all political opposition using whatever means necessary. At the center of his web is Floria Tosca, an orphan girl who has grown up to be a famous singer, the idol of all of Rome. She is endlessly fascinating—beautiful, impulsive, jealous, passionate, and naïve. She is overwhelmingly in love with one man, but becomes the unwitting tool of his political enemy. The opera is the perfect storm of love, revenge, and betrayal. All set to music that is as gripping as it is beautiful.

THE CREATORS

Giacomo Puccini was 41 years old when *Tosca* premiered at Rome's Teatro Costanzi on January 14, 1900. It was his fifth opera, and by then most people would have agreed with George Bernard Shaw's opinion that "Puccini looks to me more like the heir of Verdi than any of his rivals." There were numerous other Italian composers who had written hit operas, but no one could match the sustained popularity of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1893) and *La Bohème* (1896). Today *Tosca* is so perfectly a part of the Puccini canon that it seems odd he would have wavered about composing it. Ten years elapsed between his first plea to his publisher, Ricordi, to acquire the rights to Victorien Sardou's 1887 play *La Tosca* (a vehicle for the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt) and the opera's premiere. At one point, Puccini seemed to lose interest, so the composer Alberti Franchetti was assigned the operatic rights. When Puccini found out he demanded the opera back for himself. Ricordi realized a *Tosca* by Puccini was likely to be more popular than one by Franchetti, so he tricked Franchetti into giving up the project, insisting the play was too violent to be a successful opera. The very next day Puccini was given the rights.

For the libretto, Ricordi once again turned to the team of Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacoso, the men responsible for the libretti of *Manon Lescaut* and *La Bohème*, and Puccini's next opera, *Madama Butterfly*. Sardou's play (in French) was five acts and had 23 characters. Illica and Giacoso whittled it down to three acts and nine characters, keeping the plot taut and increasing the tension from act to act. It's a rare soprano who does not long to play Tosca, and the role of Baron Scarpia is one of the plums of the baritone repertoire—both roles offering unusually rich opportunities for singing actors. And few tenors would pass up the opportunity to sing the part of the passionate Cavaradossi.

THE SETTING

The opera is set in Rome, on a single day in June 1800. Sardou's play is more specific—June 17, 1800, three days after Napoleon's victory against the Austrians at Marengo. That military event looms larger in the play than in the opera,

though when the news of the victory bursts onto the scene in Puccini's second act it gives Cavaradossi, an ardent liberal supporter of Napoleon, the occasion to hurl his "Vittoria! Vittoria!" at his political opponent Scarpia. Act I is set in the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle, Act II in Scarpia's apartment on an upper floor of the Farnese Palace, Act III on a terrace of Castel Sant'Angelo. All three locations are actual places in Rome.

THE MUSIC

Tosca is an opera of action and Puccini's music brilliantly captures the swiftly changing dramatic situations and the emotions of the characters, enhanced by more instrumental color than he had ever used before. Puccini went to great lengths to get each detail exactly right—discovering the precise tone of the great bell of St. Peter's, the correct form of the Te Deum used in Roman churches, even climbing to the top of Castel Saint'Angelo at dawn to hear how the bells of the surrounding churches sounded at Matins. Puccini uses musical contrasts to create character—the lovers with their sensuous duets contrast with Scarpia's more declamatory outbursts—and to heighten the drama: for instance Scarpia's dramatic entrance in Act I (accompanied by the crashing chords that begin the opera) instantly kills the choirboys' joyous celebration. A little later the Te Deum and religious procession is juxtaposed with Scarpia's evil plotting, highlighted by his hypocrisy when he joins in the religious observance. Act II is justly famous for the way the music repeatedly ratchets up the cat and mouse game Scarpia plays with Tosca almost to the breaking point. *Tosca* is melodrama at its most magnificent. But the opera also has the arias we expect from Puccini: with Tosca's famous Act II "Vissi d'arte" and Cavaradossi's meltingly beautiful arias in the first and third acts the composer has outdone himself.

IN SAN FRANCISCO OPERA HISTORY

Tosca opened the War Memorial Opera House on October 15, 1932 with Claudia Muzio, one of the legendary singers of the 20th Century, in the title role. Dino Borgioli was Cavaradossi and Alfredo Gandolfi was Scarpia with Company general director and founder Gaetano Merola conducting. Act I was broadcast live on NBC's Red Network allowing the entire nation to listen to the historic occasion. The preserved recording of that event is the only live performance of Muzio known to exist. *Tosca* had been an important part of San Francisco Opera from its very first season, when the cast of Bianca Saroya, Giovanni Martinelli, and Giuseppe De Luca (conducted by Merola) began the tradition of stellar casting—something that has continued through the years. In 1965 audiences were able to compare the Cavaradossi of Sandor Konya, Jess Thomas, and Franco Corelli all of whom sang opposite Marie Collier in the title role and with tenor-turned-baritone Ramón Vinay as Scarpia. In 1978 Montserrat Caballé, Gwyneth Jones, and Magda Olivero all sang *Tosca* to the Cavaradossi of Luciano Pavarotti and Juan Lloveras and the Scarpia of Giuseppe Taddei and Giorgio Tozzi. Rather surprisingly Lotte Lehmann, famous for her Wagner and Strauss roles, made her debut with the company as *Tosca* (and followed it up with the title role of *Madama Butterfly*) in 1934. Stella Roman also

bowed as Tosca in 1941. Dorothy Kirsten was already a beloved figure on the War Memorial stage when she sang her first Tosca in 1951 but it became one of her most popular roles; when she bid farewell to the company in 1972 it was as Tosca.

Among many other stars of the past who have appeared as Tosca with San Francisco Opera are Maria Jeritza, Renata Tebaldi, Leontyne Price, Régine Crespin, and Leonie Rysanek. Beniamino Gigli, Jussi Björling, Mario Del Monaco, and Plácido Domingo are just a few of the tenors who have sung Cavaradossi with the company. Notable Scarpias include Antonio Scotti, Marcel Journet, Lawrence Tibbett, Leonard Warren, and Ettore Bastianini. Belgian bass José Van Dam made his company debut as Angelotti in 1970—18 years before his acclaimed return to the company as the Dutchman in Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

It was *Tosca* that brought San Francisco Opera back home to the War Memorial Opera House in 1997 after an 18-month closure for seismic retrofitting to inaugurate its 75th anniversary with Nello Santi conducting Carol Vaness, Richard Margison, and James Morris. *Tosca* once again welcomes the company back home for the first staged opera in the War Memorial since the pandemic shutdown, with new music director Eun Sun Kim conducting Ailyn Pérez, Michael Fabiano, and Alfred Walker.

Writer, lecturer, and teacher Paul Thomason is currently writing a book on the music of Richard Strauss.

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<https://sfopera.ihubapp.org/posts/84308/tosca-cast-creative>

TOSCA

(sung in Italian with English supertitles)

Opera in three acts by Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa

Based on the drama *La Tosca* by Victorien Sardou

Sung in Italian with English supertitles

CAST

FLORIA TOSCA

Ailyn Pérez ♪

MARIO CAVARADOSSI

Michael Fabiano

BARON SCARPIA

Alfred Walker ♪

ANGELOTTI

Soloman Howard ♪

SACRISTAN

Dale Travis

SPOLETTA

Joel Sorensen

SCIARRONE

Timothy Murray *♪♯

JAILER

Stefan Egerstrom *♪♯

SHEPHERD BOY
Elisa Sunshine *♪†

Soldiers, police agents, priests, citizens

*San Francisco Opera debut ♪ Role debut † Current Adler Fellow

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor

Eun Sun Kim

Director

Shawna Lucey

Production Designer

Robert Innes Hopkins

Lighting Designer

Michael Clark

Chorus Director

Ian Robertson

Fight Director

Dave Maier

Assistant Conductor

Dennis Doubin

Prompter

Matthew Piatt

Musical Preparation

Bryndon Hassman

Ronny Michael Greenberg

Andrew King †

John Churchwell

Fabrizio Corona

Celeste

Bryndon Hassman

Organ

Ronny Michael Greenberg

Diction

Alessandra Cattani

Supertitles
Christopher Bergen

Assistant Directors
Roy Rallo
E. Reed Fisher

Stage Manager
Jayme O'Hara

Assistant Stage Managers
Anna Reetz
Jessica Barker
Rachel Garoon

Costume Supervisor
Jai Alltizer

Head of Wig and Makeup
Jeanna Parham



This production is made possible, in part, by Carol and Dixon Doll; John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn; Burgess and Elizabeth Jamieson; Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem, through the Great Interpreters of Italian Opera Fund; Joan and David Traitel; and Barbara A. Wolfe.

Ms. Pérez, Mr. Fabiano and Mr. Walker's appearances are made possible by a gift to the Great Singers Fund by Joan and David Traitel.

Additional funding is provided by Diana Dollar Knowles Foundation and Ms. Christina & Dr. Elizabeth DeBruin Warren.

San Francisco Opera production

August 21, 2021 at 7:30 pm

August 27, 2021 at 7:30 pm

August 29, 2021 at 2 pm

September 3, 2021 at 7:30 pm

September 5, 2021 at 2 pm

The performance will last approximately two hours and thirty minutes including two intermissions.

Latecomers may not be seated during the performance after the lights have dimmed. Patrons who leave during the performance may not be re-seated until intermissions.

The use of cameras, cell phones, and any kind of recording equipment is strictly forbidden. Please turn off and refrain from using all electronic devices.

[< Main Synopsis >](#)

<https://sfopera.ihubapp.org/posts/84764/tosca-synopsis>

SYNOPSIS

ACT I – A Church

Cesare Angelotti, a political prisoner and former leader of the Napoleon resistance, has just escaped from the prison at Castel Sant'Angelo and is seeking refuge in a nearby church. As Angelotti hides in his family's chapel, a sacristan enters followed by the painter Mario Cavaradossi, who begins to work on a portrait of Mary Magdalene. Angelotti comes out of hiding and asks for his friend Cavaradossi's assistance but hides again as the voice of the painter's lover, the famous opera singer Floria Tosca, is heard. She enters demanding to know why the door to the church was locked and suspects Cavaradossi of being with another woman. He reassures her of his fidelity, and the lovers agree to meet later that evening. A cannon shot is heard announcing Angelotti's escape, and the friends flee. The sacristan gathers the choir boys, telling them they must rehearse for a special performance for which Tosca will be the soloist celebrating Napoleon's defeat. At that moment, the Roman chief of police, Baron Scarpia, arrives searching for Angelotti. Scarpia, suspecting Cavaradossi's complicity in Angelotti's escape, convinces Tosca that Cavaradossi has run off with another woman. Scarpia knows that Tosca's jealousy will lead him to Cavaradossi, and thus to Angelotti. As the Te Deum hymn builds in intensity, he vows to ensnare them all.

ACT II – A Room in Scarpia's apartments in the Palazzo Farnese

Having detained the Marchesa Attavanti for aiding her brother's escape, Scarpia receives word of Cavaradossi's arrest. He summons Tosca from her concert in the courtyard below, and she is shocked to see the captured Cavaradossi. Scarpia tries to extract Angelotti's hiding place from Tosca, but she pleads ignorance. Yet as Scarpia raises the stakes, torturing Cavaradossi, she capitulates, revealing the secret and asking Scarpia for Cavaradossi's freedom in return. Delirious from torture Cavaradossi hears Scarpia order his men to Angelotti's hiding place, curses Tosca, and cries defiance as news emerges that Napoleon was actually victorious.

Tosca pleads for her lover's life, and Scarpia offers her an exchange: if she will submit to his lust, he will save Cavaradossi's life. In despair, she pleads for mercy but realizes she must agree to the bargain. Scarpia tells Tosca there will be a mock execution, but circuitously orders his henchman to make preparations for a real one. At Tosca's request, he then writes a safe-conduct pass for her and Cavaradossi. Tosca, having discovered a dagger among the tributes and bribes that Scarpia has received, stabs him, takes the safe-conduct pass and goes to find Cavaradossi.

ACT III – On top of the Castel Sant'Angelo

Waiting for his execution, Cavaradossi bribes the jailer so that he can write a farewell letter to Tosca, recalling the intensity of their love and mourning that he will never see her again. Tosca runs in, explaining that she has murdered Scarpia but they will escape—the execution will be faked and with their safe-conduct pass they can flee together. The lovers ecstatically plan for the future but are interrupted by the arrival of the firing squad. After the shots, Tosca bids Cavaradossi to wait until the soldiers are gone and then asks him to escape with her. She is horrified to discover that the execution was real after all, and distant shouts announce Scarpia's murder. As the soldiers rush in to seize Tosca, she curses Scarpia's betrayal, climbs to the fortress parapet, and leaps to her death.

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[At a Glance >](#)

<https://sfopera.ihubapp.org/posts/84766/directors-note-shawna-lucey>



Director's Note: Shawna Lucey



The Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire said that “it is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong.” When designer Robert Innes Hopkins and I began a few years ago to discuss Puccini’s masterpiece, we were struck again and again by the pervasive corruption endemic to *Tosca*’s Rome. It is the kind of odious corruption like mold-producing water damage that rots from within until structures collapse. How does a moral, ethical person navigate a world where institutions tasked with protecting the common good have been usurped to serve the nefarious desires of unchecked tyrants? Do you compromise in small ways daily for survival until your own personal integrity is shredded into nonexistence? When do you stand up and fight back?

The task of creating a new production of a beloved opera and extremely significant title for San Francisco Opera is one we have joyfully and seriously taken on. Puccini’s masterpiece, ideal for novice and aficionado alike, grabs the audience by the throat with Scarpia’s chords at the downbeat and does not shake free until eternity is brought down upon our main players. Act I, Puccini tells us, takes place at Sant’Andrea della Valle. With Robert, we found the breathtaking Duomo di San Giorgio in Ragusa, Sicily as our inspiration: the Duomo’s primary colors are as visually vivid as Puccini’s music. In Act II, Scarpia’s office within the Palazzo Farnese is a kind of elegant rat’s nest, full of bribes and tributes from a cowering populace he extorts as he

“protects” them. And Act III—the roof atop Castel Sant’Angelo, where long-suffering Roman citizens meet their state-ordered end—is a place that God has turned his back on, lest one witnesses the crimes men visit upon each other. Having been inspired by the portraits of Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, one of only fifteen women admitted to the French Royal Academy in her lifetime, we worked to create the clothing of *Tosca*’s Rome—a time when the city did not rival Paris for fashion, had been under siege for years, and was desperately missing the patronage of the Pope.

Each of these spaces are as charged as Puccini’s music and as complex as the characters who inhabit this world. Floria Tosca, swept from her simple sheepherding childhood because of her extraordinary gift of singing, manages to keep her faith and peasant wisdom even as the corruption of Scarpia’s Rome washes over her. Mario Cavaradossi, whose politics begin as a fashion statement for annoying conservative priests, when tested, inspires incredible bravery and resistance. His love and passion for Tosca, which are the true meanings of his existence, fall also victim to the tyranny of the police chief’s treachery. And Baron Scarpia is a self-made man with no time or tolerance for artsy idealists who don’t understand that someone must preserve law and order—and whose sadistic sexual proclivities and lust for power demolish the lives and dignity of every life he touches.

With Napoleon and his unstoppable forces bearing down on a Rome without the protection of the Pope, our main three characters become ensnared in the horrible net of treachery, intrigues, lies, moral turpitude, and fraudulence that extinguishes them all. Grand opera means grand tragedies. But in a world where corrupt dealings decay civic institutions, torture is fair and legal, and the Church colludes with tyrants for self-preservation, a woman fights back against her fate and the damning crush of this society. *Tosca* is a piece for today like almost never before.

<https://sfopera.ihubapp.org/posts/84347/meet-the-music-director-eun-sun-kim-qa>



Meet the Music Director: Eun Sun Kim

What differences are there between being a guest conductor and music director? What is happening behind the scenes that the audience might not see?

In terms of rehearsing and performing it's all the same whether you are a guest conductor or music director: you do your job, the *first* job. As music director, you have other responsibilities such as administrative work in addition to rehearsal time, and, of course, doing interviews [laughs]. I was in Chicago last week for a concert that was planned before I started in San Francisco. During those rehearsals, I was, of course, constantly in contact with both my assistant and the assistant conductor for *Tosca* here in San Francisco to organize our rehearsal times and carry out various tasks.

Despite the loss of so many engagements last year due to COVID, I'm actually grateful to have had time in Zoom meetings to get to know the Company and the members better. It was the first time that I had meetings so regularly and I felt like someone who works for a company, not like a

traveling artist. I kind of understand now why so many people look forward to the weekends [laughs]. Maybe I'm understanding a little bit more about our audience after spending so much time in meetings.

Your Zoom meetings led to a new kind of empathy?

Yes. The audience spends the whole day with their jobs and other activities before they are coming into the opera house. I save my energy during the day so I can use 100% of it in the performance, which is the other way around. I think the combination of those two is just right.

I wonder if we could talk about your first time conducting with San Francisco Opera for *Rusalka* in 2019. The music, singing, production, stage craft ... it all worked together so beautifully, like magic! From your perspective, how did it happen? Because it doesn't always come together like that.

It doesn't, but it should! And I always try to get it that way, but that magical moment is not always something you can anticipate or prepare for. I think it has to just happen [claps hands] and then we can call it magic. The funny thing is that I'm a very positive and optimistic person. In terms of rehearsing, I'm realistic and self-critical so I'm constantly under pressure—the pressure that I'm giving myself—and asking myself whether I am missing something in the score or if I am good enough to interpret this or that. When I do that, I get ideas and then I can try them with our team. The magic with *Rusalka* is because it was teamwork. I felt like in that production there was no diva or divo, everyone was part of a team.

In symphony concerts the audience sees the orchestra on the stage with the conductor. But in the opera, they see the singers and then some of the heads of musicians in the pit and maybe the baton of the conductor. But there are so many crew members behind the scenes. We have costume staff, as well as stage crew, technicians, electricians, janitors, and many more. In opera, I feel that everything behind the scenes, the singers, plus the orchestras, that whole thing is like one big orchestra, and we're all professionals. And this is just like the orchestra of musicians in the pit who are professionals on their instruments, and I get to work with them in interpreting the music. I sometimes feel like I'm the one who is between the audience and our team. There is a wall around the pit and I'm standing right there at the edge: I'm the first one from the audience side and I'm the last one from our team's side.

Do you anticipate that same process leading to a magical *Tosca*?

At least from rehearsals, yes. We haven't been on the stage yet, but yes, I'm very happy with everything so far.

When did you first conduct *Tosca*?

My first *Tosca* was in Italy. I still remember the smell of the theater even though the Macerata Festival is outdoors. The orchestra musicians there were telling me how Maestro Puccini had created it and we discussed the bowings for the string parts, etc. San Francisco will be my second production of the opera, and the historical connections here are exciting for me. I am also looking forward to the pianissimos and the atmosphere we can accomplish from making music together inside the War Memorial Opera House.



Eun Sun Kim with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra in rehearsal for *Rusalka* in 2019. Photo: Cory Weaver/San Francisco Opera

You've also conducted *La Bohème* and *Madama Butterfly*. How does *Tosca* compare with them for the conductor?

Of those three, *Tosca* is, for me, the most difficult, because I have to work to stay grounded in order not to get swept away by the emotion. It's not the story, but the language of Puccini, his harmony and the instrumentation.

Just take Rodolfo's aria in *Bohème* or the last aria of *Butterfly*. Although they're very emotional, I'm still enjoying them with the singers and going along with the music. With *Tosca*, I need to focus on making the drama with music. So, the music has to be really visual and it has to drive or it all falls apart, especially in the first act. From that first chord until it is finished, I feel like I cannot relax for even a second because there is a lot happening: Angelotti enters, then the tenor, Tosca, the chorus and Scarpia. It's a weird thing, but I actually find myself enjoying that, like I need to be a control freak in the first act [laughs]. In the second act, there is a clear drama so you don't have to drive it.

What are you most looking forward to as we return to the opera house?

The shared, live experience. Did you see the movie *Parasite*? The director, Bong, said in an interview that with cinema you have to go with the director's arc. You cannot just sit at home and push the play button, stop, zoom, or anything like that. You have to live with the film. It's the same in opera. I think the magic you talked about before is not just through our preparation; I think it's synergy of those invisible energies going on between the audience and our team; you

have to experience it simultaneously and in the same place. I think our performances have to be like this.

What do you want San Francisco Opera audiences to know about you as an artist?

When we perform it's not about ESK. It's not about me, it's about the music. I really want our audience to have an individual connection to each performance. Of course, I want to say so much with the music, each bar and color, but everyone digests the music differently. I just want them to enjoy that individual connection.

What is at the top of your list for getting to know the city of San Francisco? Finding a favorite bookstore? The perfect burrito? You know, we have lots of options for those.

I didn't know about that! Actually, I would like to ask for a list of what kind of activities I could enjoy here. I'm still very new in town.

Is that a parallel with your career in Europe? When you reach a new city and you're wondering what to do while you're there?

It's very difficult when I'm working in some new place because I never get to enjoy the city. It doesn't matter whether I'm in San Francisco or in Frankfurt, you prepare the score, rehearse, and then you perform. When the opening night is over, we usually have a few days and sometimes I like to go to a museum, like the art museum, or I'll search Google for good restaurants. I like to eat and want to try the famous food of the city or of that region. I can do that the day after a performance, but the day before I cannot. Even though you have time, you don't have time mentally. I think it's the fate of being an artist. I chose my life and this profession, so in that way I'm enjoying my life. But if you know the best burrito place please tell me.

Do you listen to music at home?

No. I already have music going the whole day. For example, we are rehearsing *Tosca* now. Some measures we rehearse, they just remain in here [points to head] and never leave. Last week [for the concert in Chicago], we did Shostakovich Piano Concerto 1 and Dvořák Symphony 9. Two or three bars of the Shostakovich... I couldn't get rid of that music until I went into *Tosca* rehearsals here. Another reason is that whenever I hear music I automatically begin analyzing it and it's just like work. But I do enjoy music when I get invited by friends and they have quiet jazz music or something in the background. Then I can enjoy it while having some drinks and conversation. But at home I usually love silence.

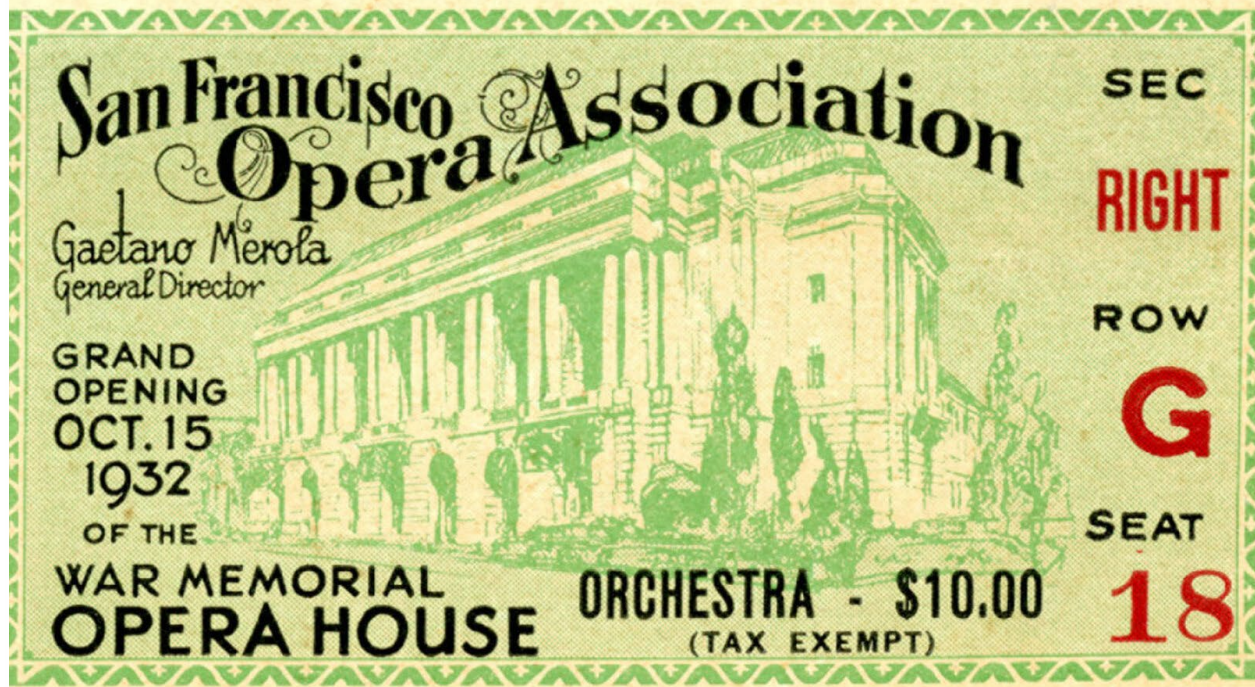
Wonderful. Thank you very much for taking the time today and have a great weekend.

You too. The weekend is here... it's happening!

During her inaugural season as Caroline H. Hume music director, Eun Sun Kim conducts Puccini's *Tosca* (August 21–September 5), *Live and In Concert: The Homecoming* with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and soloists Rachel Willis-Sørensen and Jamie Barton (September 10); a new production of Beethoven's *Fidelio* (October 14–30), the San Francisco Opera Adler

Fellows' *The Future Is Now* concert (December 10) and a summer 2022 tribute to the music of Giuseppe Verdi (June 30).

<https://sfopera.ihubapp.org/posts/84348/tosca-at-sfo-by-kip-cranna>



Tosca by the Bay: San Francisco Loved Her from the Beginning

San Francisco Opera turns to *Tosca* for special occasions. The reopening of the War Memorial Opera House after an all-too-long pandemic-driven lockdown is just such an occasion. But hardly the first.

Puccini's ever-popular melodrama of soaring melody, stark violence and super-heated passions, famously derided by a noted Bay Area musicologist as a "shabby little shocker," has been the go-to repertoire choice for important San Francisco Opera observances since it took its place in the new company's first season at the Civic Auditorium in 1923.

But the show was already an established hit on the local scene years before San Francisco Opera's birth. After the world premiere of the opera in Rome in 1900, the piece swiftly crossed the Atlantic for its American premiere at New York's Metropolitan Opera in February of 1901. America's taste for modern Italian opera was bicoastal: the following year *Tosca* arrived in San Francisco, where it made quite an impression. Reviewing the November 1902 opening at the Tivoli Opera House (then on Eddy Street between Powell and Mason), the *San Francisco Call* expressed amazement:

There is nothing talked today among the music folk in town but "La Tosca," the new Puccini opera that the wonderworkers at the Tivoli gave us on Tuesday night last. As things look, there are likely to be "La Tosca" duels, feuds that divide families, "La Tosca" vendettas and what not; for "La Tosca" has come to bring war, not peace, into the music camps ... Puccini's latest work has created more talk, argument, championship and opposition than any opera given here within memory. It is the newest of the new, the music of the immediate future, and the voice of to-day at its clearest and most powerful. One may not like it, one may bitterly reject it, yet there are none to resist its spell, none to deny its genius.

Controversial, yes. But the admirers of this "music of the immediate future" were clearly in the majority. By 1910 the work had been heard here 18 times. And it might be noted that in that decade Bay Area audiences were perhaps equally familiar with the play that was Puccini's source, the French author Victorien Sardou's historical drama *La Tosca*, which had several well-publicized runs in those years. (The play has the article "La" in its title, but strictly speaking, the opera does not.)

May 1 - 1911

PRICE **35** CENTS

THE LAST VISIT TO AMERICA.

Sarah Bernhardt

SEASON 1910-1911



Sarah Bernhardt

LA TOSCA

AS REPRESENTED BY
MME. SARAH BERNHARDT
AND COMPANY.

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF WM. F. CONNOR.

PUBLISHED BY
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Sardou's play, *La Tosca*, was written to showcase actress Sarah Bernhardt.

During the 1910s *Tosca* came through town several times with touring Italian companies. In September 1920 the Antonio Scotti Company presented it at the Civic Auditorium with Florence Easton as Tosca and the American tenor Mario Chamlee as Cavaradossi. The impresario Scotti was the Scarpia, a role for which he was legendary. He remains the Metropolitan Opera's record holder for most performances of a leading role—217 as Puccini's villainous baron. He also sang it with San Francisco Opera but only once in 1927. Perhaps by then he had tired of the long trek to the West Coast.

Close on the heels of the Scotti company's 1920 performances, the San Carlo Opera Company brought *Tosca* back in January 1921 at the Curran Theatre with Anna Fittiu as the diva and Gaetano Merola, soon to become founder of San Francisco Opera, on the podium. But the city's hankering for *Tosca* that year was not sated. In September the Scotti company returned to reprise the work for a huge crowd at the Civic. This time the diva was the Metropolitan Opera's splendid leading lady Geraldine Farrar in her West Coast opera debut, along with Chamlee again as the hero, and Scotti, of course, as Scarpia. The *San Francisco Chronicle* ran an impressive wide-shot photo acclaiming the "throng" of enthusiastic fans.

By the time San Francisco Opera included the work in its inaugural season in 1923, one might assume the locals had had enough of it for a while. Wrong! *Tosca* returned for all but two of the Company's first nine seasons—an almost perennial must-see thanks, in no small part, to legendary diva and early Company favorite Claudia Muzio often assuming the title role. It surely would have been hard to find an informed local citizen who had not heard the piece at least once.

But there was plenty more to come. *Tosca* was chosen to inaugurate the Company's permanent home, as the long-delayed but finally completed War Memorial Opera House welcomed its first audience on October 15, 1932. The following decades saw its return almost annually. The piece was inevitably part of the 50th season repertoire in 1972. And in 1997, after the 18-month closure of the Opera House for renovation and earthquake retrofit, *Tosca* was the vehicle for the theater's resplendent reopening to launch the 75th season.



Act I finale of *Tosca* from the 1932 opening of the War Memorial Opera House. Photo: Lawrence B. Morton

As this popular piece now returns to mark another reopening, opera-lovers deprived for so long of live performances can hear their relief expressed in the first words sung in the opera, “Ah! Finalmente!” Yes, finally.

San Francisco Opera and its audience certainly have a thing for *Tosca*. In overall performances (counting the mainstage, tours, and the off-season affiliate Spring Opera Theater) it has racked up a tidy grand total to date of 188 in 41 different seasons.

Over the decades this famous diva vehicle has brought with it a lustrous array of great leading ladies to perform the title role. To name a few (in chronological order): Claudio Muzio, Maria Jeritza (who sang the famous aria “Vissi d’arte” lying flat on her stomach, a tradition she initiated), Lotte Lehmann, Dorothy Kirsten, Renata Tebaldi, Lucine Amara, Leontyne Price, Marie Collier, Régine Crespin, Leonie Rysanek, Monteserrat Caballé, Eva Marton, Leona Mitchell, Carol Vaness, Angela Gheorghiu, Patricia Racette, and Carmen Giannattasio.



Leontyne Price as Tosca in Act II with John Shaw as Scarpia. Photo: Robert Cahen

The record holder for the most appearances here as Tosca (in fact the most in *any* leading role), is the New Jersey-born Kirsten, with 28 performances over 10 seasons beginning with her role debut here in 1951. Among tenors, Giacomo Aragall's previous record of 13 performances as Cavaradossi between 1974 and 1989 has now been eclipsed by local favorite Brian Jagde, with a total of 20 in three seasons between 2012 and 2018.



Dorothy Kirsten as Tosca (left, with Tito Gobbi as Scarpia in 1960) is San Francisco Opera's record holder for most performances in a leading role. Renata Tebaldi (right, taking a bow with Jussi Björling as Cavaradossi) sang an encore in Act II. Photo: Robert Lackenbach

In other *Tosca* trivia of note, Renata Tebaldi's portrayal of the role in 1955 made headlines when, at the October 15 performance of her aria, the legendary artist (to quote *San Francisco Examiner* critic Arthur Bloomfield) "put across a 'Vissi d'arte' which seemed to hypnotize the audience, and when they recovered from the spell they broke into wild applause." As the din continued unabated, conductor Glauco Curjel decided to do an encore. The formidable General Director Kurt Herbert Adler fumed at this breach of protocol, but the audience was thrilled. In nearly a century of presenting *Tosca*, San Francisco Opera has had only six different physical productions. Stage director Armando Agnini, a close associate of Maestro Merola, directed every mounting of the opera from 1923 until 1952. The decorous, very traditional painted flat scenery was typical of the pre-war era.

Last presented in 1970, Agnini's by then venerable but aging *Tosca* was replaced for the 50th season in 1972 by a bold and controversial new staging by famed French designer-director Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, with Plácido Domingo as Cavaradossi. The audience was given a "back view" of major set elements like the high altar in Act I and the archangel's statue in Act III, both revealed from the rear as empty, cross-braced facades.

In one of Ponnelle's many striking staging bits, Tosca stabbed Scarpia in the back of the neck with a long knife as he sat his desk, pinning him to its surface like a beetle to a specimen tray. (Shabby little shocker, indeed.) She then made her slow, cautious escape through three sets of central double doors, the last of which opened to reveal an immense looming portrait of the man she had just murdered. It was a dramatic masterstroke for those patrons lucky enough to be

sitting dead center on the orchestra level (where stage directors sit during rehearsals), but the action was invisible to the rest of the audience, who wondered what was happening.



Act II setting of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's production of *Tosca*, 1972.

Ponnelle's version returned for four more seasons and was presented in Manila in 1979 in San Francisco Opera's first and only foreign tour, featuring Domingo along with Hungarian soprano Eva Marton. The visit was lavishly hosted and bankrolled by Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos, whose notorious shoe collection (among other excesses) had not yet made international headlines.

In danger of wearing out its welcome, the Ponnelle *Tosca* was supplanted in 1987 by the equally well-worn—but at least new to San Francisco—conventional sets of Pier Luigi Pizzi loaned by Lyric Opera of Chicago. Perhaps as a distraction from the faded allure of the painted drops, the first act featured no fewer than 65 supernumeraries (non-singing extras) and 25 boy choristers along with regular chorus. This meant a crowded stage and a busy night for the wardrobe department.



Pier Luigi Pizzi's Act II set for *Tosca*, 1987.

Since Chicago and San Francisco both needed a fresh *Tosca*, Lyric partnered with SFO in 1992 on a locally built co-production designed by Tony Walton and directed by Frank Galati. Veering from tradition, their postmodern conception featured scenic elements set askew and tilted in sharp angles amid huge empty gold picture frames. The Castel Sant'Angelo in Act III was tipped sideways, half-buried in dust. Some found all this intriguing and provocative while others deemed it muddled and confusing.



Act III finale of the 1992 new production of *Tosca*.

On the heels of that production, General Director Lotfi Manouri opted to create a new *Tosca* in 1997 that would pay homage to the Company's past for the reopening of the house after its 18-month revamp. He turned to his friend and frequent collaborator, Belgian artist Thierry Bosquet, whose elegant costumes and sets had already been seen here in numerous operas, including historical recreations of classic *Ruslan and Lyudmila* and *Der Rosenkavalier* productions. And he was already at work on a lush and dreamy new *Pélleas et Mélisande* for later that same season. Bosquet's "archival" designs for *Tosca* were deliberately retrospective, evoking the look of the original Agnini production from the 1920s. Scenic artist Susan Tuohy used her consummate skills to transfer Bosquet's plans to flat scenery with time-honored techniques of forced perspective and *trompe l'oeil*.

Carol Vaness in the title role cut a fine figure, elegant and regal in Bosquet's Empire waistline gowns. Many hailed this artful salute to the Company's history, while others sniffed at what they viewed as stuffily archaic and old-fashioned, a case of misguided nostalgia. But the unarguably attractive décor proved highly serviceable, seen in 6 seasons totaling 57 performances, including a 2009 simulcast to the videoboard at AT&T (now Oracle) Park that was experienced by more than 27,000.



Carol Vaness as Tosca in the 1997 new production designed by Thierry Bosquet and Susan Tuohy.

In 2018 the new interpretation of *Tosca* that returns this season was unveiled, directed by Shawna Lucey and designed by Robert Innes Hopkins. Lucey aimed for a “classic” approach that uses a vivid array of primary colors and vibrantly opulent costumes, with several notable surprises in the staging for which this article will decline to be a spoiler. Hint: Be on the lookout for Angelotti’s usually unseen sister, the Marquesa Attavanti.

Reviewing the Lucey production after its 2018 opening, Operawire remarked, “San Francisco Opera has always been in love with Puccini’s *Tosca*. From 1932, when the War Memorial Opera House first opened its doors, until today, this opera has been its darling. Every Opera [General] Director has wanted her on its stage; every dramatic soprano has wanted to perform her.”

And every generation of operagoers, one might add, has wanted to see her.

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