

A Night At The Opera

**Friday,
May 12, 2023
6:30PM**

Historical context

According to the libretto, the action of *Tosca* occurs in Rome in June 1800. Sardou, in his play, dates it more precisely; *La Tosca* takes place in the afternoon, evening, and early morning of 17 and 18 June 1800.

Italy had long been divided into a number of small states, with the Pope in Rome ruling the Papal States in Central Italy. Following the French Revolution, a French army under Napoleon invaded Italy in 1796, entering Rome almost unopposed on 11 February 1798 and establishing a republic there. Pope Pius VI was taken prisoner, and was sent into exile on February 20, 1798. (Pius VI would die in exile in 1799, and his successor, Pius VII, who was elected in Venice on 14 March 1800, would not enter Rome until 3 July. There is thus neither a Pope nor papal government in Rome during the days depicted in the opera.) The new republic was ruled by seven consuls; in the opera this is the office formerly held by Angelotti, whose character may be based on the real-life consul Liborio Angelucci. In September 1799 the French, who had protected the republic, withdrew from Rome. As they left, troops of the Kingdom of Naples occupied the city.

In May 1800 Napoleon, by then the undisputed leader of France, brought his troops across the Alps to Italy once again. On 14 June his army met the Austrian forces at the Battle of Marengo (near Alessandria). Austrian troops were initially successful; by mid-morning they were in control of the field of battle. Their commander, Michael von Melas, sent this news south towards Rome. However, fresh French troops arrived in late afternoon, and Napoleon attacked the tired Austrians. As Melas retreated in disarray with the remains of his army, he sent a second courier south with the revised message. The Neapolitans abandoned Rome, and the city spent the next fourteen years under French domination.

Tosca

By Giacomo Puccini

Librettist: Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

World Premiere: Teatro Costanzi, Rome, 1900

Act 1

Cesare Angelotti, former consul of the Roman Republic and now an escaped political prisoner, runs into the church and hides in the Attavanti private chapel – his sister, the Marchesa Attavanti, has left a key to the chapel hidden at the feet of the statue of the Madonna. The elderly Sacristan enters and begins cleaning. The Sacristan kneels in prayer as the Angelus sounds.

The painter Mario Cavaradossi arrives to continue work on his picture of Mary Magdalene. The Sacristan identifies a likeness between the portrait and a blonde-haired woman who has been visiting the church recently (unknown to him, it is Angelotti's sister the Marchesa). Cavaradossi describes the "hidden harmony" ("Recondita armonia") in the contrast between the blonde beauty of his painting and his dark-haired lover, the singer Floria Tosca. The Sacristan mumbles his disapproval before leaving.

Angelotti emerges and tells Cavaradossi, an old friend who has republican sympathies, that he is being pursued by the Chief of Police, Baron Scarpia. Cavaradossi promises to assist him after nightfall. Tosca's voice is heard, calling to Cavaradossi. Cavaradossi gives Angelotti his basket of food and Angelotti hurriedly returns to his hiding place.

Tosca enters and suspiciously asks Cavaradossi what he has been doing – she thinks that he has been talking to another woman. After Cavaradossi reassures her, Tosca tries to persuade him to take her to his villa that evening: "Non la sospiri, la nostra casetta" ("Do you not long for our little cottage"). She then expresses jealousy over the woman in the painting, whom she recognises as the Marchesa Attavanti. Cavaradossi explains the likeness; he has merely observed the Marchesa at prayer in the church. He reassures Tosca of his fidelity and asks her what eyes could be more beautiful than her own: "Qual'occhio al mondo" ("What eyes in the world").

After Tosca has left, Angelotti reappears and discusses with the painter his plan to flee disguised as a woman, using clothes left in the chapel by his sister. Cavaradossi gives Angelotti a key to his villa, suggesting that he hide in a disused well in the garden. The sound of a cannon signals that Angelotti's escape has been discovered. He and Cavaradossi hasten out of the church.

The Sacristan re-enters with choristers, celebrating the news that Napoleon has apparently been defeated at Marengo. The celebrations cease abruptly with the entry of Scarpia, his henchman Spoletta and several police agents. They have heard that Angelotti has sought refuge in the church. Scarpia orders a search, and the empty food basket and a fan bearing the Attavanti coat of arms are found in the chapel. Scarpia questions the Sacristan, and his suspicions are aroused further when he learns that Cavaradossi has been in the church; Scarpia mistrusts the painter, and believes him complicit in Angelotti's escape.

When Tosca arrives looking for her lover, Scarpia artfully arouses her jealous instincts by implying a relationship between the painter and the Marchesa Attavanti. He draws Tosca's attention to the fan and suggests that someone must have surprised the lovers in the chapel. Tosca falls for his deceit; enraged, she rushes off to confront Cavaradossi. Scarpia orders Spoletta and his agents to follow her, assuming she will lead them to Cavaradossi and Angelotti. He privately gloats as he reveals his intentions to possess Tosca and execute Cavaradossi. A procession enters the church singing the Te Deum; exclaiming 'Tosca, you make me forget even God!' Scarpia joins the chorus in the prayer.

Act 2

Scarpia, at supper, sends a note to Tosca asking her to come to his apartment, anticipating that two of his goals will soon be fulfilled at once. His agent, Spoletta, arrives to report that Angelotti remains at large, but Cavaradossi has been arrested for questioning. He is brought in, and an interrogation ensues. As the painter steadfastly denies knowing anything about Angelotti's escape, Tosca's voice is heard singing a celebratory cantata elsewhere in the Palace.

She enters the apartment in time to see Cavaradossi being escorted to an antechamber. All he has time to say is that she mustn't tell them anything. Scarpia then claims she can save her lover from indescribable pain if she reveals Angelotti's hiding place. She resists, but the sound of screams coming through the door eventually breaks her down, and she tells Scarpia to search the well in the garden of Cavaradossi's villa.

Scarpia orders his torturers to cease, and the bloodied painter is dragged back in. He is devastated to discover that Tosca has betrayed his friend. Sciarrone, another agent, then enters with news: there was an upset on the battlefield at Marengo, and the French are marching on Rome. Cavaradossi, unable to contain himself, gloats to Scarpia that his rule of terror will soon be at an end. This is enough for the police to consider him guilty, and they haul him away to be executed.

Scarpia, now alone with Tosca, proposes a bargain: if she gives herself to him, Cavaradossi will be freed. She is revolted, and repeatedly rejects his advances, but she hears the drums outside announcing an execution. As Scarpia awaits her decision, she prays, asking why God has abandoned her in her hour of need: "Vissi d'arte" ("I lived for art"). She tries to offer money, but Scarpia is not interested in that kind of bribe: he wants Tosca herself.

Spoletta returns with the news that Angelotti has killed himself upon discovery, and that everything is in place for Cavaradossi's execution. Scarpia hesitates to give the order, looking to Tosca, and despairingly she agrees to submit to him. He tells Spoletta to arrange a mock execution, both men repeating that it will be "as we did with Count Palmieri", and Spoletta exits.

Tosca insists that Scarpia must provide safe-conduct out of Rome for herself and Cavaradossi. He easily agrees to this and heads to his desk. While he's drafting the document, she quietly takes a knife from the supper table. Scarpia triumphantly strides toward Tosca. When he begins to embrace her, she stabs him, crying "this is Tosca's kiss!" Once she's certain he's dead, she ruefully says "now I forgive him." She removes the safe-conduct from his pocket, lights candles in a gesture of piety, and places a crucifix on the body before leaving.

Act 3

A shepherd boy is heard offstage singing (in Romanesco dialect) "Io de' sospiri" ("I give you sighs") as church bells sound for matins. The guards lead Cavaradossi in and a jailer informs him that he has one hour to live. He declines to see a priest, but asks permission to write a letter to Tosca. He begins to write, but is soon overwhelmed by memories: "E lucevan le stelle" ("And the stars shone").

Tosca enters and shows him the safe-conduct pass she has obtained, adding that she has killed Scarpia and that the imminent execution is a sham. Cavaradossi must feign death, after which they can flee together before Scarpia's body is discovered. Cavaradossi is awestruck by his gentle lover's courage: "O dolci mani" ("Oh sweet hands"). The pair ecstatically imagine the life they will share, far from Rome. Tosca then anxiously coaches Cavaradossi on how to play dead when the firing squad shoots at him with blanks. He promises he will fall "like Tosca in the theatre".

Cavaradossi is led away, and Tosca watches with increasing impatience as the firing squad prepares. The men fire, and Tosca praises the realism of his fall, "Ecco un artista!" ("What an actor!"). Once the soldiers have left, she hurries towards Cavaradossi, urging him, "Mario, su presto!" ("Mario, up quickly!"), only to find that Scarpia betrayed her: the bullets were real. Heartbroken, she clasps her lover's lifeless body and weeps.

The voices of Spoletta, Sciarrone, and the soldiers are heard, shouting that Scarpia is dead and Tosca has killed him. As the men rush in, Tosca rises, evades their clutches, and runs to the parapet. Crying "O Scarpia, avanti a Dio!" ("O Scarpia, we meet before God!"), she flings herself over the edge to her death.

We hope everyone enjoyed listening to the beautiful music.

Thank you for attending!

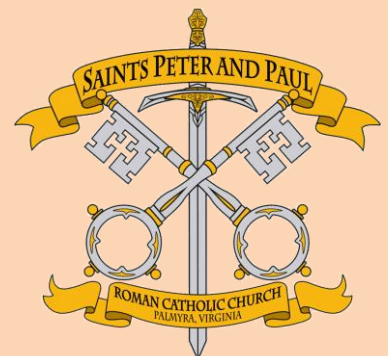
Refreshments served during intermission



*A special Thank You to the Music Ministry
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