

**Student Dress Rehearsal  
Classroom Kit  
Opera Grand Rapids  
Performance Date: November 5, 2008  
7:30 pm, DeVos Performance Hall**

## ***TOSCA* Classroom Kit**

Thank you for joining us for our Dress Rehearsal of *TOSCA*.  
Enclosed are a variety of materials to help prepare your students for the opera.

An Act-by-Act preview of the story and the music is available as an MP3/Podcast download on our website [WWW.OPERAGR.COM](http://WWW.OPERAGR.COM). This preview, narrated by the Conductor is a wonderful way to prepare students for the show.

### **ENCLOSED MATERIALS:**

Theater Rules

Vocabulary

Sections of an opera

Reaction Sheet Assignment

Cast & Scenes

Composer Biography

Opera synopsis (the story)

Historic notes about *TOSCA*

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## **General Rules for Students**

It is not necessary for students to *dress up* to attend the rehearsal. The Rehearsal is LIVE, and the audience affects what happens on stage, in the orchestra, and behind the scenes. YOU are a part of the rehearsal process, please help us out with your full concentration and we will have a fabulous rehearsal!

## **Theater Etiquette**

In order for everyone in the audience to fully enjoy the performance, it is necessary to have some basic rules. Following are some basic reminders to share with your students, so that everyone can enjoy the show.

- Do not bring outside food, drinks or gum into the theater.
- Cameras, phones and video devices are not allowed during the performance!
- Please, arrive early so you can be seated by the 7:30 pm start time. A late arrival means your class may miss the beginning during the *black out*.
- Take your seats promptly upon arrival and at the end of the intermission.
- Talking is for before and after the performance, and for intermission only. Silence in the house is necessary for the singers, orchestra and the rest of the audience to enjoy the show.
- There is no box office the night of the rehearsal, so only those with tickets in hand will be allowed into the theater. Please sit in the seats assigned to you.

## Opera Vocabulary

**Act.** One of the main divisions of a drama, opera or ballet, usually completing a part of the action and often having a climax of its own.

**Aria.** [ah-ree-ah] A song sung by one person. In Italian, aria means "air," "style," "manner." The aria had a central place in early opera and throughout operatic history, arias have been used to highlight an emotional state of mind and accentuate the main characters.

**Baritone.** The most common category of the male voice; lower than a tenor, but higher than a bass. Baritones were more commonly used in during the Romantic opera era.

**Bass.** The lowest male voice. Many bass roles are associated with characters of authority or comedy.

**Finale.** The ending segment of an act or scene.

**Librettist.** The person who writes the text (words) of the opera.

**Libretto.** [lih-breh-toh] The text of the opera. In Italian, it means "little book."

**Lyrics.** Words of an opera or of a song.

**Mezzo-soprano.** The mid-range female voice. Mezzo-sopranos usually play either older women or young boys.

**Orchestra.** A group of musicians led by the conductor who accompany the singers.

**Overture.** An orchestral introduction played before the action begins. The overture is often used to set the mood of the opera. Many composers used the overture to introduce themes or arias within the opera and sometimes the overture became more well known than the opera itself.

**Recitative.** Dialogue which is "sing-speak." The recitative helps get through a lot of text quickly and moves the action along. Often precedes an aria or ensemble.

**Soprano.** The highest female voice. The soprano is commonly the lead female character.

**Tenor.** The highest natural male voice. Often the lead male character within the opera.

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## **Sections of the Opera -What You Will Hear**

**Overture.** Instrumental introduction or prelude to the opera which takes place before the curtain rises. Occasionally, overtures may be staged, but there is no singing involved.

**Aria.** Song sung by a solo singer. Arias are generally very melodic and used to showcase the Singer's vocal abilities.

**Duet.** Song sung by two singers.

**Trio.** Song sung by three singers.

**Recitative.** Musical passages composed to imitate speech. Recitatives are usually full of dialogue and are used to quickly move the plot along. Many times a recitative will come before an aria.

**Chorus.** Name for both a large group of singers as well as the songs they sing.

## **After-Opera Reaction Sheet**

1. What was the theater like? Was it different than what you were expecting?
2. Was the music the same or different than you were expecting? How so?
3. Which was your favorite character? Why?
4. What was your favorite part of the opera? Why?
5. Were there any events or situations in the opera that you related to? Describe.
6. How did the different elements of the opera (characters, music, scenery) work together as a whole? Did you like it? Why or why not?
7. What was the most important thing you learned from seeing this opera?

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# ***TOSCA***

By Giacomo Puccini

Conductor	Robert Lyall
Director	Jay Jackson
Scenic Designer	Gordana Svilar
Lighting Designer	Don Darnutzer
Chorus Master	Duane Davis
Wig Designer	Jim McGough
Costume Designer	Susan Allired
Accompanist	Robert Byrens
Stage Manager	Brett Finley

We kindly request that no cameras or other recording devices be used during tonight's performance. Any form of video or audio recording, including the use of cell phones, during this performance is strictly prohibited. Contents of this program, including repertoire and casting is specified as correct at the time of publication, but is subject to change without notice and/or refunds.

## **Cast of Characters**

(in order of vocal appearance)

Cesare Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner	John Scheid
Sacristan	William Bokhout
Mario Cavaradossi, a painter	Robert Breault
Floria Tosca, an opera singer	Mardi Byers
Baron Scarpia, chief of police	Mark Rucker
Spoletta, a police officer	Matthew Speck
Sciarrone, a gendarme	Gary Gramer
Shepard Boy	Miles Coleman
Jailer	Fred Overeem

Cardinal, bishop, priests, Swiss guards, choirboys, townspeople, judge and executioner

## **The Scenes**

Time & Place: Rome, 1800

Act I: The church of Sant'Andrea della Valle  
(15 minute intermission)

Act II: Scarpia's apartment in the Palazzo Farnese  
(15 minute intermission)

Act III: The Castel Sant'Angelo

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## **Giacomo Puccini**

### Composer Biography



Giacomo Puccini was born on the 23rd of December, 1858 in Lucca, Italy. The descendent of a long line of musicians, conductors, and composers, it was assumed would continue in his family's artistic legacy.

In 1880, a stipend from a wealthy great-uncle and a scholarship from Queen Margherita supported Puccini in his education at the music conservatory in Milan, where he wrote his first opera *La Villi*, which was performed at La Scala. His second work *Edgar* was recieved poorly. Puccini found success with his third work *Manon Lescaut* in 1893. Its success established him as a composer. His next two works, *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* continued his success.

In the world of twentieth century music he was known as the "King of Verismo," a true master of theater. Puccini limited his work to the operatic stage. He became known for his ability to capture the passion of life's everyday moments.

In the single decade before his death, Puccini composed *La Rondine* , *Il Tabarro*, *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi*. He was in the process of finishing *Turandot*, when he was diagnosed with throat cancer in 1924. Following his death, the completion of his work was left to his apprentice, Franco Alfano. *Turandot* became the last opera to rank as an internationally accepted standard repertory piece. No one since Puccini has enjoyed such a following.

**The great Italian Operatic composer Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) is beloved among opera-goers above all others.**

His great works include:

*Manon Lescaut* (1893)

*La Boheme* (1896)

*Tosca* (1900)

*Madama Butterfly* (1904)

*Il Tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, *Gianni Schicchi* (a trio of short works) (1918).

*Turandot* (1924)

## **The Synopsis - the Story of the Opera**

### **TOSCA**

Composer: Giacomo Puccini

#### **ACT I**

Cesare Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner, rushes into the church of Sant' Andrea della Valle to hide in the Attavanti chapel. As he vanishes, an old Sacristan shuffles in, praying at the sound of the Angelus. Mario Cavaradossi enters to work on his portrait of Mary Magdalene - inspired by the Marchesa Attavanti (Angelotti's sister), whom he has seen but does not know. Taking out a miniature of the singer Floria Tosca, he compares her raven beauty with that of the blonde Magdalene ("Recondita armonia"). The Sacristan grumbles disapproval and leaves. Angelotti ventures out and is recognized by his friend and fellow liberal Mario, who gives him food and hurries him back into the chapel as Tosca is heard calling outside. Forever suspicious, she jealously questions him then prays, and reminds him of their rendezvous that evening at his villa ("Non la sospiri la nostra casetta?"). Suddenly recognizing the Marchesa Attavanti in the painting, Tosca explodes with renewed suspicions, but he reassures her ("Qual' occhio al mondo"). When she has gone, Mario summons Angelotti from the chapel; a cannon signals that the police have discovered the escape, so the two flee to Mario's villa. Meanwhile, the Sacristan returns with choirboys who are to sing in a Te Deum that day. Their excitement is silenced by the entrance of Baron Scarpia, chief of the secret police, in search of Angelotti. When Tosca comes back to her lover, Scarpia shows her a fan with the Attavanti crest, which he has just found. Thinking Mario faithless, Tosca tearfully vows vengeance and leaves as the church fills with worshipers. Scarpia, sending his men to follow her to Angelotti, schemes to get the diva in his power ("Va, Tosca!").

#### **ACT II**

In the Farnese Palace, Scarpia anticipates the sadistic pleasure of bending Tosca to his will ("Ha più forte sapore"). The spy Spoletta arrives, not having found Angelotti; to placate the baron he brings in Mario, who is interrogated while Tosca is heard singing a cantata at a royal gala downstairs. She enters just as her lover is being taken to an adjoining room: his arrogant silence is to be broken under torture. Unnerved by Scarpia's questioning and the sound of Mario's screams, she reveals Angelotti's hiding place. Mario is carried in; realizing what has happened, he turns on Tosca, but the officer Sciarrone rushes in to announce that Napoleon has won the Battle of Marengo, a defeat for Scarpia's side. Mario shouts his defiance of tyranny ("Vittoria!") and is dragged to prison. Scarpia, resuming his supper, suggests that Tosca yield herself to him in exchange for her lover's life. Fighting off his embraces, she protests her fate to God, having dedicated her life to art and love ("Vissi d'arte"). Scarpia again insists, but Spoletta interrupts: faced with capture, Angelotti has killed himself. Tosca, forced to give in or lose her lover, agrees to Scarpia's proposition. The baron pretends to order a mock execution for the prisoner, after which he is to be freed; Spoletta leaves. No sooner has Scarpia written a safe-conduct for the lovers than Tosca snatches a knife from the table and kills him. Wrenching the document from his stiffening fingers and placing candles at his head and a crucifix on his chest, she slips from the room.

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### **ACT III**

The voice of a shepherd boy is heard as church bells toll the dawn. Mario awaits execution at the Castel Sant'Angelo; he bribes the jailer to convey a farewell note to Tosca. Writing it, overcome with memories of love, he gives way to despair ("E lucevan le stelle"). Suddenly Tosca runs in, filled with the story of her recent adventures. Mario caresses the hands that committed murder for his sake ("O dolci mani"), and the two hail their future. As the firing squad appears, the diva coaches Mario on how to fake his death convincingly; the soldiers fire and depart. Tosca urges Mario to hurry, but when he fails to move, she discovers that Scarpia's treachery has transcended the grave: the bullets were real. When Spoletta rushes in to arrest Tosca for Scarpia's murder, she cries to Scarpia to meet her before God, then leaps to her death.

## **Historic Notes on *TOSCA***

*Tosca* debuted in 1900 but the action is set in 1800, during the Napoleonic wars. Puccini wanted everything as historically accurate as possible.

Puccini looked at even the smallest details in order to achieve a near perfect correspondence between stage action and historic reality. For *La Bohème* he needed to set his subject in the past because he wanted realism. *Tosca*, with its escapes, tortures and executions, needed an exact definition of the historical time in order to concentrate attention on the personal dramas of the characters. The surrounding events have no degree of freedom.

We have seen that every reference to historic figures, places and events such as General Mélas and the Battle of Marengo is exact. That was not enough. Puccini researched the liturgical practices at Rome for the Te Deum of the first finale. The morning bells of Act 3 required a list of all the churches surrounding Castel Sant'Angelo and their bells, including the respective pitches.

The search for accuracy continued during the preparation of the premiere. Puccini insisted that the costume designs (particularly the sacred vestments) be based on research of historical documentation. The designs for the scenes were made by Adolfo Hohenstein, the leading artist at the publishing house of Ricordi (he designed the scenery for all important premieres of Ricordi's scores in the period from Falstaff to Madama Butterfly). The drawings (see pictures page) were made from photos of the actual settings provided by Puccini. The authors' attention to realistic detail requires a similar attitude in the staging of *Tosca*. Even minor license (like having the Cardinal conduct the service from the painter's scaffolding) is simply unacceptable.

Puccini's melodies are woven to create an intense psychological tapestry, in which the characters struggle with their consciences and with each other. The harsh manipulations of Scarpia, the agent of a supposedly conservative and Christian government, make people such as Mario turn to revolutionary dictators like Napoleon, who promise liberty and freedom. How history repeats itself over and over again.

## **Tosca & Religion**

by Wendy Neikirk  
Boston Lyric Opera

From the suspenseful opening scene in the Attavanti chapel to Floria Tosca's final declamation of, "Scarpia we meet before God," Tosca is a work steeped in religion. While the plot of Tosca is not overtly religious, religion is an ever-present element winding through the opera appearing again and again in setting, characters, props and music. How is it that Tosca came to have such integral and dramatic religious elements?

### **Puccini and Religion**

Although Puccini's religious views were skeptical, there is no doubt that he had been fully versed in the beliefs, traditions and pageantry of the Roman Catholic church. Puccini's family tree boasted a large number of church musicians. He was brought up in the church and as an adolescent served as organist in Lucca's Cathedral of San Martino from 1872-1880. In addition to his early experiences in the church, as an adult Puccini had several close friends who were very devout in their faith, including Father Pietro Panichelli and Father Dante Del Fiorentino. Puccini affectionately referred to Panichelli as *il pretino*, the little priest, because of his stature and called Del Fiorentino *gonnellone*, or big skirts, due to the large Cossack that he always wore. These men, both close friends of Puccini, commented on his cynicism towards religion. In addition, the Catholic authorities in Rome considered Puccini a dangerous heretic. Thus, while Puccini was knowledgeable about the Church, it is doubtful that he ascribed to its beliefs.

### Sardou's Tosca

Puccini's Tosca is based on a play by French playwright and political satirist, Victorien Sardou (1831-1908), entitled *Le Tosca*. Sardou's play, with five acts and twenty-three characters, is quite lengthy. In it Sardou masterfully creates a story with substantial historical and political overtones. Sardou's work includes many allusions to historical events like the Battle of Marengo and individuals such as Napoleon Bonaparte and Queen Caroline of Naples. Sardou is not content with simply alluding to events or glossing over characterizations, his characters are well-developed and he establishes their background information as the plot unfolds. Tosca is one such character.

Sardou's play takes care to inform the audience of Tosca's past. He answers the question, "How did she come to be *Le Tosca*, the diva?" Sardou explains that as a child Tosca herded goats in the Roman countryside. Her nomadic lifestyle ended when Benedictine nuns who sympathetically took her in and raised her in the convent, where she began to sing. The girl's singing earned her local fame and she was "discovered" by the composer Cimerosa who desperately desired for her to become an opera singer. The nuns just as desperately wanted her to become a nun. Tosca's singing was so remarkable that she was eventually taken to sing for the Pope at the Vatican. The Pope was greatly touched by her singing and released her from the convent, pronouncing, "You will soften all hearts as you have softened mine. You will make people shed gentle tears, and that is also a way of praying to God."

### Religion in Puccini's Tosca

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Not surprisingly then, Puccini presents Tosca as a very religious woman. He depicts her leaving flowers on the alter of the Attavanti chapel and refusing to kiss Mario before the picture of the Madonna. She is devout in her prayers and her piety is noted by the Sacristan. In Puccini's story, after Tosca has killed Scarpia, she places a crucifix on his chest and lights candles for him. In fact, her final cry while leaping from the parapet is a challenge to Scarpia that they will meet before God, revealing her unwavering faith in eternal retribution. Puccini clearly establishes that Tosca is a devout woman, but he never explains why.

While Puccini may be vague regarding Tosca's background, he is scrupulously detailed in many of the other religious elements of his opera. The intoning of church bells is often heard in Tosca, and Puccini wanted the sound to accurately reflect the bells of the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, the setting of Tosca. To insure this, Puccini arranged a special trip to Rome for the sole purpose of determining the pitch, timbre and pattern of the bells. He even climbed to the top of the tower at the Castel Sant'Angelo to clearly experience the Matin bells, rung in the morning by all the area churches and heard in Act Three of Tosca.

The Te Deum utilized by Puccini is an actual liturgical melody. In his quest for accuracy, Puccini wrote to his friend, Father Pietro Panichelli and requested a suitable text to be intoned during the Cardinal's traditional procession before the Te Deum. In his letter Puccini stated, "I know that it is not usual to say or sing anything before the solemn Te Deum ?but I repeat that I should like to find something to be murmured during the procession?" Panichelli was not able to locate a text for Puccini, but did send him the actual plainsong melody used for the Te Deum in the Roman diocese and included a detailed description of both the order of the Cardinal's processional and the uniforms of the Swiss Guard. Puccini continued his search for an appropriate text, and soon found one in an old Latin prayer book.

While there are clear religious overtones in the music of Tosca, the elements of religion in the plot and Puccini's stage direction are perhaps more obvious and dramatic. The entire first act is set in the Attavanti chapel of the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle. Religious icons and a large, partially completed, portrait of the Madonna fill the stage, emphasizing the ecclesiastical setting.

While the second act is in the secular setting of Scarpia's residence at the Palazzo Farnese, the act concludes with highly dramatic religious imagery. Tosca, who moments before emphasized her commitment to love, beauty, compassion, music and faith in her aria *Vissi d'arte*, kills the villainous Scarpia, scoffing, "may your sins now devour you!" Once Scarpia is dead, Tosca triumphantly declares, "Now I forgive him!" She takes time to wash her hands and arrange her hair, grabs the paper that will ensure her and Mario's safe-conduct out of Rome, and then begins to run from the room; however, Tosca's faith stops her. She is compelled to show a measure of compassion and respect for the dead. She takes two candles from the candelabra and lights them, one on each side of Scarpia's head, reverently places a crucifix, taken from the wall, on his chest and quietly leaves the room.

The third act takes place on the platform of the Castel Sant'Angelo. Although the act is dominated by Tosca and Cavaradossi's declarations of love and Cavaradossi's subsequent execution, Tosca's final exclamation reflects the strong religious overtones of this work. As she leaps to her death from the

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parapet, Tosca challenges, "O Scarpia, we meet before God!" The struggle between the vivacious singer and the villainous Chief of Police is not over, Tosca believes she is and will continue to be the eternal victor.

Puccini's *Tosca* is a strong dramatic work, combining lush melodies and a gripping plot with the color, pageantry and power of the nineteenth century Roman Catholic Church. While Puccini was not a devout believer, *Tosca* is full of religious icons, melodies and traditions that he uses to create dramatic contrasts and suspense. Floria Tosca's faith is central to her character and enhances the contrast with Baron Scarpia's lechery, greed and cruelty. The sacred and peaceful setting of the Attavanti chapel is incongruous with Angelotti's desperate and fearful discussions with Cavaradossi. The pastoral sounds of the Matin bells contrast sharply with Tosca and Cavaradossi's passionate declarations of love and the solemn military precision of the execution. Indeed, while the plot is full of political suspense and ardent love, it can be argued that the dramatic impetus of *Tosca* comes from Puccini's use of powerful and contrasting religious imagery.