

# TOSCA



## Study Guide 2010/11 Season

**"[It's] poetry and again poetry — tenderness mixed with pain; sensuality; a drama surprising and burning; and a rocketing finale."**

**- Puccini on his own musical style**

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## WELCOME TO MANITOBA OPERA!

We're very pleased that you have decided to bring your students to *Tosca*. We appreciate both your interest in this wonderful art form and your willingness to expose students to opera and thank you for that.

This Study Guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that you will be able to add this to your existing curriculum in order to expand your students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts. Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students.

Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is insufficient time to discuss in class. You can make the opera experience more meaningful and enjoyable by sharing with them knowledge and background on opera and *Tosca* before they attend Student Night.

### **Singing in Full Voice at the Dress Rehearsal (Student Night)**

Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to avoid unnecessary strain.

*Tosca* Study Guide compiled by Manitoba Opera from sources including Bellevue University, *The Billboard Illustrated Encyclopedia of Opera*, The Canadian Opera Company, *Encyclopedia of Manitoba*, *Fort Worth Opera 2000 Study Guide*, *La Scena* Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Manitoba Archives, Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, *Opera America Learning Centre*, *Opera Columbus Study Guide*, *Opera News*, *Operas Every Child Should Know*, *Opéra Lyra Ottawa Study Guide*, *Opera Today*, *Orchestra London Study Guide*, *San Diego Opera Study Guide*, *San Francisco Opera Guild Study Guide*, *schubincave.com*, *A Season of Opera*, *Skeletons from the Opera Closet*, *Tulsa Opera Study Guide*, *University of Chicago Press*, *University of Manitoba*, *University of Texas*, *Rimrock Study Guide*, *Virginia Opera Study Guide*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Wikipedia*, and [www.musicwithease.com](http://www.musicwithease.com)

### **About Manitoba Opera**

Founded in 1969 by a group of individuals dedicated to presenting the great works of opera to Manitoban audiences, Manitoba Opera is the province's only fulltime professional opera company. The company attracts great international artists, highlights the best local talent and is supported by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra under the direction of internationally renowned conductors. Manitoba Opera celebrated its 35th Season in 2007/08 by presenting the world premiere of an opera commissioned by the company, *Transit of Venus*.

### **The Principals**

The people who have the major roles in an opera are called the principals and are singers who work professionally. Principals usually arrive about three weeks before the first performance. It is generally expected that they arrive with all of their music learned and memorized and have a good sense of their character in the opera. In rehearsal each day, they work with the director who helps them block each of the scenes. The director works with the principals on understanding their characters so that they are convincing in their acting, as well as their singing. For the first

two weeks they are accompanied by a rehearsal pianist. The week of the show, they move into the Concert Hall and begin work rehearsing on stage with the orchestra in the pit.

### **The Chorus**



The Manitoba Opera Chorus, under the direction of Chorus Master, Tadeusz Biernacki, is hailed for their excellent singing and acting abilities. The chorus boasts a core of skilled singers who give generously of their time and talents. Some are voice majors at university, a few are singing teachers, but many work in jobs that aren't music related. By the time you visit the Centennial Concert Hall to see *Tosca*, the chorus of Manitoba Opera will have been busy at work for several months.

### **The Staff**

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## A SHORT OVERVIEW OF OPERA



**An opera, like a play, is a dramatic form of theatre that includes scenery, props, and costumes. In opera, however, the actors are trained singers who sing their lines instead of speaking them. An orchestra accompanies the singers. A conductor coordinates both the singers on stage and the musicians in the orchestra pit.**

Opera consists of many dimensions: the human voice, orchestral music, the visual arts (scenery, costumes and special effects), drama (tragedy or comedy), and occasionally dance. The melding of these elements creates one incredible theatrical experience.

**Opera has its roots in Greek drama and originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500's, with a small group of men who were members of a Camerata (Italian for society).** The intellectuals, poets and musicians of the Camerata decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music. They used ancient Greek drama as their inspiration, including the use of a chorus to comment on the action.

**The Camerata laid down three principles for their new art form:**

- The text must be understood; the accompaniment must be very simple and should not distract from the words.
- The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation, as if they were spoken, and must avoid the rhythms of songs.
- The melody must interpret the feeling of the text.

The first significant composer to fully develop the ideas of the Camerata was Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), whose opera *Dafne*, based on a Greek myth, was performed in 1594 and is regarded as the first opera.

**Operas are divided into scenes and acts that contain different types of vocal pieces for one or many singers.** An aria is a vocal solo that usually focuses on a character's emotions rather than actions. A recitative is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and ensembles. It helps to further the action of the story and shape the relationships between the characters.

**The story of the opera is written as a libretto, a text that is set to music.** Composers write the score or the music for the opera. Sometimes the composer will also write the text of the opera, but most often they work with a librettist. In the past, the libretto was also bound and sold to the audience. Today, the audience can easily follow the plot with the use of surtitles - the English translation of the libretto, which are projected onto a screen above the stage.

There are several differences between opera and musicals like *Phantom of the Opera*. One significant difference is the 'partnership' found between the music and the drama in an opera.

**While musicals use songs to help tell a story, in an opera, the music contributes to the drama, it does not only accompany it.**

The musical style is another important difference between the two art forms; opera is usually classical and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes rock and roll. Also, singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices. **The voices of opera singers are so strong no amplification is needed, even in a large venue.** Furthermore, operas are almost completely sung while the use of spoken words are more common to musicals. There are some operas with spoken words and these are called singspiels (German) and opera-comique (French). Examples are Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Bizet's *Carmen*, respectively.

## PRODUCTION INFORMATION

# TOSCA

An Opera in Three Acts

November 20, 23, 26, 2010  
(Dress Rehearsal / Student Night: November 18)  
Centennial Concert Hall

Music by Giacomo Puccini  
Libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa  
Based on Victorien Sardou's drama, "La Tosca"

Premiere Performance: Teatro Costanzi, Rome, January 14, 1900

APPROXIMATELY 2 HOURS, 30 MINUTES WITH TWO 20-MINUTE INTERMISSIONS  
Sung in Italian with projected English translations

### PRINCIPAL CAST (In Order of Vocal Appearance)

ANGELOTTI, an escaped political prisoner	David Watson	Baritone
SACRISTAN of the Church of Sant' Andrea della Valle	Peter Strummer	Bass
CAVARADOSSI, a painter	Richard Margison	Tenor
TOSCA, a celebrated singer	Wendy Nielsen	Soprano
SCARPIA, chief of police	Gaétan Laperrière	Baritone
SPOLETTA, a police agent	Keith Klassen	Tenor

### Also Appearing

SCIARRONE, a police officer	David Watson	Baritone
A SHEPHERD BOY	TBC	Soprano
A JAILOR	TBC	Baritone

### With

Manitoba Opera Chorus  
Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra

Conductor  
Director  
Sets and Props provided by  
Costumes provided by  
Lighting Designer  
Stage Manager  
Assistant Stage Managers  
Chorus Master  
Children's Chorus Director

Tyrone Paterson  
Valerie Kuinka  
Seattle Opera  
Malabar Ltd. (Toronto)  
Bill Williams  
Paul Skirzyk  
Kathryn Ball, Candace Maxwell  
Tadeusz Biernacki  
Carolyn Boyes

# TOSCA SYNOPSIS



Composed by Giacomo Puccini  
Libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa  
Based on Victorien Sardou's drama *La Tosca*  
Place: Rome  
Time: June 1800  
First Performance: Teatro Constanzi, Rome, January 14, 1900  
Original Language: Italian

## ACT I.

Cesare Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner, rushes into the church of Valle to hide in the Attavanti chapel. As he vanishes, an old Sacristan shuts the door, and the sound of the Angelus. Mario Cavaradossi enters to work on his portrait of Magdalene - inspired by the Marchesa Attavanti (Angelotti's sister), whom he does not know. Taking out a miniature of the singer Floria Tosca, he compares her beauty with that of the blonde Magdalene ("Recondita armonia"). The Sacristan disapproves and leaves. Angelotti ventures out and is recognized by his friend, the liberal Mario, who gives him food and hurries him back into the chapel as he is calling outside. Forever suspicious, she jealously questions him, then proposes their rendezvous that evening at his villa ("Non la sospiri la nostra casa"). Recognizing the Marchesa Attavanti in the painting, she explodes with rage, 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.

### **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.

-- Courtesy of *Opera News*

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



### SCARPIA

#### Gaétan Laperrière

*"... just the right darkness and weight on the one hand and expressive flexibility on the other."*

– *Ottawa Citizen*

The breadth of Gaétan Laperrière's lyric baritone repertoire reaches into the heroic Italian roles so suited to his instrument. The *Boston Globe* praised his "nobility of tone, line and characterization."

Upcoming performances include Alfio/Tonio in *Cavalleria Rusticana/I Pagliacci* at Opera Lyra Ottawa, Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte* at the Michigan Opera Theatre, Germont in *La Traviata* at the Phoenix Metropolitan Opera, Amonasro in *Aida* with Calgary Opera, and *Falstaff* at Opéra de Québec.

Over the past two seasons, engagements include the Villains in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* with Opera Colorado and Boston Lyric Opera, Pandolfe in *Cendrillon* with L'Opéra de Montreal, Don Magnifico in *La Cenerentola* with the Florida Grand Opera, the title role in *Falstaff* with Opera Cleveland, Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* with the Manitoba Opera and Opera Hamilton, Alfio/Tonio in *Cavalleria Rusticana/I Pagliacci* with Opéra de Québec, *Rigoletto* at Opera Company of North Carolina and Fresno Grand Opera, Beethoven's *9th Symphony* with The Jeunesses Musicales, and Athanael cover in a new production of *Thais* at the Athens Concert Hall in Greece.



### CAVARADOSSI

#### Richard Margison

*"... a voice with body, strong and powerful, but also rich with expression."*

– *Winnipeg Free Press*

Hailed for his ringing top notes and spine-tingling power, Canadian tenor Richard Margison is one of the most critically acclaimed singers on the international stage today. He performs regularly in many of the world's leading opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, the Deutsche Oper Berlin, the San Francisco Opera, the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, Covent Garden, the Sydney Opera and the Grand Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona.

Mr. Margison's 2010/2011 season celebrates his Canadian roots with performances across the country featuring his signature roles - he opens the season as Calaf in Puccini's *Turandot* with Opera Lyra Ottawa, followed by Manrico in *Il Trovatore* with l'Opéra de Québec, and Bacchus in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with the Canadian Opera Company. Spring 2011 sees Mr. Margison return to his home of British Columbia for a recital tour around the province with acclaimed pianist Kinza Tyrrell. In addition he reprises his celebrated role as O'Brien in Lorin Maazel's *1984* in Valencia Spain.



### TOSCA

#### Wendy Nielsen

*"... one of Canada's finest dramatic sopranos ..."*

– *Calgary Herald*

Whether in concert, opera or recital, Canadian soprano Wendy Nielsen enchants audiences with her sumptuous voice and engaging presence. Recent highlights include a critically acclaimed role debut as the title role in Calgary Opera's *Ariadne auf Naxos*; a return to the Metropolitan Opera for the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro*; Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* at Opera Lyra Ottawa; performances of Handel's *Messiah* with the Edmonton Symphony; Christmas concerts with the Symphony New Brunswick; and concert appearances in Alberta and elsewhere.

Wendy Nielsen has a long history with the Metropolitan Opera, where she debuted as Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* and has sung Micaela in *Carmen*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, and the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. A signature role, her Countess has been heard in Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Toronto, Calgary, Tulsa, Ottawa, and with the Minnesota Orchestra led by Jeffrey Tate. She has sung both Donna Anna and Donna

Elvira in *Don Giovanni* in Boston, Philadelphia, Minnesota, Edmonton, Tulsa; and Fiordiligi with the Florida Grand Opera and in New Jersey. She is a recipient of the Order of New Brunswick.



**SACRISTAN**  
**Peter Strummer**

*"...a superb Sacristan..."*  
– *Ottawa Citizen*

One of America's foremost character bass-baritones, Peter Strummer has earned a reputation for endowing his buffo characterizations with further depth and humanity. His signature portrayals have been described as "highly individual, each formidably different whether as Bartolo or Don Magnifico or Beckmesser or Pasquale." Upcoming engagements include Sacristan in *Tosca* at the Canadian Opera Company, Pasha Selim in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the Arizona Opera, Taddeo in *L'Italiana in Algeri* at Austin Lyric Opera, and Dulcamara in *L'Elisir d'Amore* with Kentucky Opera.

In the 2009/2010 season, engagements included Dulcamara in *L'Elisir d'Amore* with the Atlanta Opera, Bartolo in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Manitoba Opera and Arizona Opera, Sacristan in *Tosca* at the Michigan Opera Theatre, and Daland in *Der Fliegende Holländer* in concert with the Syracuse Symphony. In the 2008/2009 season, Mr. Strummer performed Magnifico in *La Cenerentola* with the Atlanta Opera, Bartolo in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Opera Carolina and Calgary Opera, Bartolo in *Le Nozze di Figaro* at Palm Beach Opera, Benoit/Alcindoro in *La Bohème* with Tulsa Opera, Sacristan in *Tosca* with Arizona Opera, and the title role in *The Mikado* at Opera New Jersey.



**Director**  
**Valerie Kuinka**

Having worked within the realm of alternative multi-disciplinary theatre to grand opera, Canadian director Valerie Kuinka brings a wealth of experience and unique creativity to her work. The list of highly accomplished artists with whom she has collaborated is extensive: Placido Domingo, Anna Netrebko, Roberto Alagna, Richard Margison, Jose Cura, Nathan Gunn, Matthew Polenzani, Veronica Tennant, Rex Harrington, Quartetto Gelato, Alannah Myles, Frank Moore, Shauna Rolston, to name but a few.

Upcoming engagements for the current season include directing productions for the Opera de Quebec, Opera Lyra, and Highlands Opera Studio.

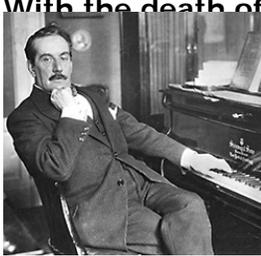


**Conductor**  
**Tyrone Paterson**

One of Canada's leading opera conductors, Tyrone Paterson has led acclaimed performances across North America, Europe and Asia. He has held the position of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of Opera Lyra Ottawa since 1998. He also serves as Music Advisor and Principal Conductor for Manitoba Opera and as an Artistic Advisor to Opera Hong Kong. He previously served for many years as Resident Conductor and Artistic Administrator for Calgary Opera. He is also a strong proponent of Music Education having been instrumental in creating OLO's Opera Studio training program as well as OLO's "Silver Cast" performances.

## ABOUT THE COMPOSER

### Giacomo Puccini (1858 - 1924)



With the death of Giuseppe Verdi in 1901, Giacomo Puccini instantly became the composer of opera and its dominant musician. Although his voice was always a very eclectic composer, the master of all contemporary styles. Puccini was equally adept with the whole-tone scale and its characteristic "impressionist" quality. He blended seamlessly with both the conventional diatonic scale and the chromaticism which is prominent in the "Spaghetti Western," *La fanciulla del West* (1910), and his operas, *Madama Butterfly* (1904) and *Turandot* (1926). But more important than his technical technique, which can be easily analyzed according to traditional theoretic principles, is the visceral, physical and emotional impact Puccini's music has on its listeners. Some would ascribe the "Puccini effect" to the composer being an exponent of *verismo* opera, but this term really only applies to one Puccini opera, *Il tabarro* (1918).

Eclectic as he was, Puccini was very consistent in one regard: evoking the most intense emotional response possible from his audience. In order to achieve this in his unique way, he needed more time, more bars of music than are found in the typical one-act *verismo* opera. To make his listeners ascend those emotional peaks that are so exhilarating, Puccini had to subtly (and often not-so-subtly) build up an exquisite kind of tension in the music that ultimately begged for a release. He did this organically, in a grand mosaic of melodic fragments repeated frequently, some of which would blossom into rhapsodic climaxes, others that would merely tease the ear, leading to a "blind alley" as it were. Inherent in this approach, which one critic unkindly labeled a "bag of tricks," is the composer's willingness to produce many bars of "low energy" music, in order to both provide a distinct contrast to the fireworks to come, and to lull the listener into a kind of repose which would make the musical orgasms all the more intense.

To accomplish what he did, Puccini had to be a musical genius of the first order, and for this he certainly had the right pedigree, representing the fifth consecutive generation of professional musicians on his father's side. Puccini was born and raised in Lucca, Italy. His father, Michele, died when Giacomo was still a boy but his mother, Albina, was a very strong woman who gave him a firm upbringing and wrote a very effective plea to the Queen for financial assistance for her son when he applied for entry into the Milan Conservatory. His mother was also musical - it was her brother who gave Giacomo his first music lessons.



Albina Magi Puccini

Not quite the youthful prodigy that Verdi was, Puccini nevertheless displayed the kind of musical talent at an early age that seemed to promise a brilliant career. It was a stroke of luck that his main composition instructor at the Conservatory was Amilcare Ponchielli (1834-1836), famous for his opera, *La Gioconda*. When Puccini impressed many with his graduation composition, *Capriccio sinfonica*, Ponchielli not only introduced Puccini to his first librettist, Ferdinando Fontana, but brought the young composer to the attention of publishing magnate Giulio Ricordi and Verdi librettist Arrigo Boito. The poet happily used his considerable influence to have the first Puccini-Fontana opera, the one-act *Le villi*, staged at Milan's Teatro del Verme in May of 1884.

This premiere was so successful that Ricordi bought the rights to it and had the opera produced in a two-act version in Turin in December. He also commissioned Puccini and Fontana to produce a full-length opera for La Scala. The pair's second opera, *Edgar*, was not staged until 1889, and then it was a disappointing flop. Puccini broke off relations with Fontana and chose subjects for his next three operas that had already proved to be extremely appealing with the public.

The first Puccini chose had not only been popular as a novel for over a century, but had been adapted as an opera several times. This was *L'Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* by Antoine François Prévost d'Exiles, known as Abbé Prévost. It had been staged most recently as *Manon* (1884), an extremely successful opera by Jules Massenet (1842-1912). Puccini judiciously named his opera *Manon Lescaut*.

**Thus Puccini began a string of operas that were both named after women and musically and dramatically focused squarely on the heroine of each (all but two subsequent**



Elvira with Puccini

**Puccini operas, both one-acts, *Il tabarro* and *Gianni Schicchi***). This has given psychology-oriented critics a great deal of material in their analyses of Puccini, who was raised by a woman and had lasting relations with several of his sisters. He also had a very tempestuous relationship with Elvira Gemignani, the wife of a prominent Lucchese businessman and a former piano student, with whom Puccini had an illicit affair that began right about the time of the death of his mother in 1884. Like Verdi before him, Puccini attempted to live openly with his mistress in his home town, but the Lucchese were so scandalized by this that the lovers had to move first to Milan and then to the isolated Torre del Lago near Lucca. They had one son, Tonio, born in 1886, who was legitimized when the couple finally married in 1904.

After the fiasco of *Edgar*, and when Puccini had settled on the *Manon Lescaut* subject, the composer was determined that no "idiot librettist" would ruin his next opera and made it known that he would write the libretto himself. Not nearly as confident of Puccini's literary ability as his musical talent, Ricordi dissuaded the composer from this course and recommended Ruggiero Leoncavallo as librettist. (Leoncavallo had not yet produced *I pagliacci*.) After summarily dismissing Leoncavallo, Puccini acquired the services of poet Marco Praga (1862-1929), who wrote a complete libretto which did not satisfy the composer either, so another poet, Domenico Oliva (1860-1917), was hired. But Oliva failed to please and Puccini once again turned to Ricordi for help.

**Here we can discern another curious pattern emerging, namely Puccini's inability to manage his librettists.** Fortunately, Giulio Ricordi so believed in

Puccini's musical genius that for the rest of his life he repeatedly acted as a kind of referee between composer and poets. This was especially the case with the frequent and acrimonious exchanges between Puccini and two more librettists, who were not only the next to work on *Manon Lescaut*, but who also collaborated on the following three (and the most popular) of the composer's operas. Luigi Illica (1857-1919) and Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906) worked as a team with Puccini, with Illica supplying the dramatic structure and Giacosa responsible for versification. As the creative process progressed in all of their collaborations from *Manon Lescaut* on, at some point or other, one or both of the librettists threatened to quit.



Giulio Ricordi

**The premiere for *Manon Lescaut* was staged at the Teatro Regio in Turin on February 1. It was a decisive triumph, an international hit that marked the turning point in the composer's career.** From this point on, Puccini could dictate his own terms with any aspect of opera composition.

According to Leoncavallo, in the winter of 1892, after he had become famous for his *I pagliacci*, and shortly before the premiere of *Manon Lescaut*, he had approached Puccini with an offer to compose the music to a finished libretto based on *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*, a popular novel by Henry Murger (1822-1861) adapted into a wildly successful play by Théodore Barrière. Puccini turned the offer down. He did, however, want to work on another sure-fire subject, so he got Ricordi to enlist Illica and Giacosa to write a libretto derived from the French novel and play, even

as he negotiated for the rights to *La lupa*, by Giovanni Verga, from whom Mascagni acquired *Cavalleria rusticana*. The result was Puccini's second consecutive success, *La bohème*, premiered on February 1, 1896, once again in Turin, with the then 23-year-old Arturo Toscanini conducting.

**Although many critics, then and now, have considered *La bohème* to be too sentimental, it has always been a hit with the public and remains to this day Puccini's most popular opera.** Part of the reason for this is that audiences identify so closely with the characters. Puccini himself, with his roommate Mascagni, sometimes dodged the landlord during their impoverished student days in Milan. Some of this experience surely gives the opera some extent of freshness and credibility.

For his next opera, Puccini again chose as his subject a popular play - an opera composer was bamboozled because of it. Alberto Franchetti (1860-1942) had to compose an opera based on *La Tosca* (1887), an internationally famous play by the legendary actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1924) by the well-known French playwright Sardou (1831-1908). Franchetti was given the rights to the play by Ricordi, who had wanted them for himself as early as 1889. A few years later it was discovered that Puccini could compose far better than anyone, so the publisher and librettist had to relinquish the rights.



Gatti-Casazza, Belasco, Toscanini, Puccini

**Premiered in Rome in January of 1900, *Tosca* marked another triumph for Puccini, but the road to success was not smooth nor uneventful.** The main problem that Ricordi had with the opera was Puccini's use of some music from *Edgar*, which was inserted in the duet passage that begins with Cavaradossi's "O dolci mani." In a long and passionate letter that spelled out his motives and methods in composing the way he did, Puccini pointed out that it would be truly remarkable if anyone recognized the music's original source and, even if they did, the music fit perfectly with the situation. To his great credit, Ricordi signed off on the project and the entire opera was performed as written.

After three consecutive triumphs, and his financial well-being assured for good, Puccini was as self-confident as he would ever be. He was even confident enough to find his very own subject for his next opera. For this he chose *Madama Butterfly*, a one-act play by the American theatrical wonder, David Belasco (1853-1931). When supervising the London premiere of *Tosca* in the summer of 1900, Puccini had seen the play and, although he could understand hardly any English, he was deeply moved by its dramatic situations and its operatic potential. Ricordi obtained the rights in 1901 and immediately thereafter Illica and Giocosa began working on the libretto.

In preparation for composing, Puccini studied every scrap of authentic Japanese music he could get his hands on so he could give his score an oriental flavor. He also incorporated the opening bars of the *Star Spangled Banner* in the first tenor aria-duet. These were musical-dramatic touches that were so typical of Puccini's approach to opera composition. With these devices and his signature development of melodic fragments that intensify the almost unbearable pathos of the drama, *Madama Butterfly* can arguably be considered his ultimate masterpiece.

**Bolstered by a string of successes and his unshakable belief that he had produced his absolutely finest work, Puccini broke with a personal tradition based on superstition and brought Elvira (whom he had recently married) and Tonio to the La Scala premiere of *Madama Butterfly* on February 17, 1904.** Puccini, however, was horrified when what he thought would be his greatest triumph to date disintegrated into a monstrous fiasco that caused him to pull the production from the stage after the first night. He quickly made a few, but significant, revisions and had the opera produced at Brescia several months later. This time it was a tremendous hit, and has been one of opera's all time favourites ever since.



Enrico Caruso

**spectacular triumph (and possibly the most sensational event in the opera world) was the 1910 premiere of *La fanciulla del West* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.** Once again, Puccini had adapted a David Belasco play, *The Girl of the*

*Golden West*, but this time, a failure was simply impossible. Directly involved in the production that was to take place in the richest city in the world, were several of the most celebrated luminaries in opera and entertainment. There was Giulio Gatti-Casazza (1869-1940), the general director of the Met, who had been hired away from La Scala. Gatti hired La Scala musical director Arturo Toscanini, who was to conduct the premiere of *Fanciulla*, and tenor Enrico Caruso (1873-1921), who would portray the opera's hero, Dick Johnson. As Minnie, the cast featured Czech soprano Emmy Destinn (1878-1930), who had starred in the Covent Garden premiere of *Madama Butterfly* with Caruso. Belasco stage directed the production and Puccini attended the rehearsals and initial performances.

As anticipated, the star-studded premiere of *La fanciulla del West* was a huge success, but after its eagerly awaited initial productions in the world's great opera houses, the work faded from the repertoire. Although this opera lacks the melodic catchiness of the most popular Puccini works, and can not really be appreciated from purely audio recordings, *La fanciulla* is an outstanding and emotionally compelling theatrical experience with a brilliant musical score. The same cannot be said, however, about the next few Puccini operas

**The composition and production of *La rondine* (1917) almost caused a permanent rift between Puccini and Toscanini.** Originally conceived as an operetta and then commissioned as a light romantic opera for Vienna in the spring of 1914, Puccini wanted to see the project through, even though Italy and Austria went to war with each other. This was merely a tiresome distraction for the completely apolitical Puccini, but because of this attitude, the ultra-patriotic Toscanini considered the composer to be a traitor. Premiered in Monte Carlo (a neutral site during World War I), this opera is hardly played at all today, and would be virtually forgotten if Puccini had not composed it.

Also neglected for their lack of musical and dramatic interest are the authentically *verismo* opera *Il tabarro* and the all-female *Suor Angelica*. These works are the first two of a group of three one-act operas that was produced as *Il trittico* for the first time at the Met in 1918. The third one-act in the group, *Gianni Schicchi*, is a hilarious comic opera, with a libretto by Giovacchino Forzano (1884-1970). It is also a superb and fresh piece of music that features the familiar and gorgeous "O mio babbino caro." It did not take long for Puccini to realize that, of the three one-acts, only *Gianni Schicchi* had lasting appeal.

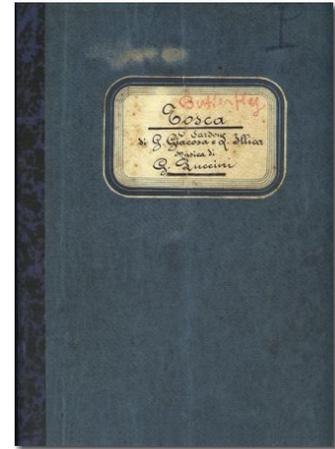


**Puccini never got to see the premiere of his last opera, *Turandot* (1926), because he died of heart failure brought on by radiation treatment for his throat cancer in Brussels on November 29, 1924.** Although the death of the composer left *Turandot* unfinished, the work was completed in true Puccini fashion - in other words, with lots of contention. Toscanini, who was entrusted by the family to oversee the opera's completion, was *not* free to appoint the composer of his choice, Riccardo Zandonai (1883-1944). Representing the family, Tonio Puccini instead named Franco Alfano (1875-1954) to compose the third act according to Puccini's vague outline. It is possible that this bitterness led to Toscanini's dramatic laying down of the baton in mid-measure on opening night.

When opera was created in 1597, the idea was to resurrect Greek tragedy. From Aristotle's *Poetics* the Renaissance Italians knew that music was an element of tragedy but they didn't know how important the music was *vis-a-vis* the drama. They also could not comprehend the meaning of *catharsis*, which Aristotle says is the main point of Greek tragedy - that is, to purge the emotions of pity and terror. It took three centuries, but Puccini seems to have found how to combine the proper proportions of music and drama to achieve *catharsis* in opera.

## THE OPERAS OF PUCCINI

- 1883-84**     *Le villi*
- 1884-85**     1901 & 1905 *Edgar*
- 1893**         *Manon Lescaut*
- 1896**         *La bohème*
- 1900**         *Tosca*
- 1904**         rev.1906 *Madama Butterfly*
- 1910**         *La fanciulla del West*
- 1917**         rev.1918-1919 *La rondine*
- 1918**         *Il trittico* *Il tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, *Gianni Schicchi*
- 1920-26**     *Turandot*, last scene completed by Franco Alfano



## TIMELINE OF PUCCINI'S LIFE

- 1858** Giacomo Puccini born, Lucca, Italy
- 1876** First contact with opera after hears *Aida*, by Verdi
- 1880** Goes to study at Milan Conservatory
- 1883** Enters his first opera *Le villi* in competition, does not win
- 1884** Two-act version of *Le villi* performed at Teatro dal Verne, Milan
- 1889** *Edgar* premieres at La Scala, Milan
- 1893** *Manon Lescaut* performed, Turin; Puccini becomes star overnight
- 1896** Premiere of *La bohème*, Turin, conducted by Toscanini
- 1900** *Tosca* performed, Teatro Costanzi, Rome  
Convent Garden premiere of *Tosca*
- 1904** *Madama Butterfly's* La Scala premiere is a fiasco .  
Revised *Madama Butterfly* performed at Bresica  
Puccini marries Elvira Gemignani
- 1907** Puccini travels to New York
- 1910** *La fanciulla del West* premieres at the Metropolitan Opera, New York
- 1912** Death of Giulio Ricordi, Puccini's publisher
- 1914** Starts work on operetta, *La rondine*  
Start of the First World War
- 1917** Premiere of *La rondine*, Monte Carlo
- 1918** *Il trittico* produced at the Metropolitan Opera, New York
- 1920** Begins work on *Turandot*
- 1924** Puccini dies of throat cancer before *Turandot* is completed
- 1926** Premiere of *Turandot* after completion by Franco Alfano, La Scala, Milan





## DRAMATIST

### Victorien Sardou

**Born:** 1831

**Birthplace:** Paris, France

**Died:** 1908

**Location of death:** Paris, France

**Victorien Sardou was a popular French dramatist during the later half of the 19th century. Sardou's plays were highly sought after as librettos for operas.**



Victorien Sardou and his family in their Drawing Room c. 1875

Victorien Sardou would be all but forgotten today, even in his native France, were it not for the extraordinary success of Puccini's opera based his 1887 play *La Tosca*. Viewed in his day as the successor to the prolific Eugène Scribe (the original source of *La Sonnambula*, *The Elixir of Love*, *A Masked Ball* and *Manon Lescaut*, among many others), Sardou was an avid historian who took pride in the wealth of factual detail he poured into his plays. In fact the overwhelming supply of erudition relative to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars that overburdens *La Tosca* makes the play a tough slog for modern readers, removed as we are a further century from the events than Puccini's audience was.

Sardou's wealth of historical verisimilitude contributes to a leisurely unfolding of the story. He wrote the work as a vehicle for the famously temperamental, histrionic French actress Sarah Bernhardt, yet the heroine does not make her entrance until about 45 minutes into the evening. The villainous Scarpia appears still later. But the play's heated melodrama and vivid characters enabled its drawbacks to be overlooked by opera librettists and composers, including the aged Verdi, who at 81 allowed that he would have made *La Tosca* into an opera had he been younger.

Puccini saw the play (in French) with Bernhardt in the lead no fewer than three times, the first in Milan in 1889, while he was still finishing preparations for his early opera *Edgar*. He was certain he had found the surefire makings of a future opera project. But years would pass before he could get to it, by which time *Manon Lescaut*, his first big hit, and *La bohème*, his second, had made him famous. Sardou had at first seemed willing to grant Puccini the rights to his play, but later changed his mind and gave them instead to one of Puccini's rivals, Alberto Franchetti.



Exactly how Puccini managed to retrieve the rights from Franchetti in order to make *Tosca* his third success is the subject of various and somewhat conflicting stories. Suffice it to say that the Puccini gave the task of distilling Sardou's wordy play into a usable form to the worthy literary team of Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. They had been among the many who worked on the *Manon Lescaut* text, and together they had created the brilliant libretto for *La bohème*. The pair somehow endured Puccini's brusque browbeating and successfully captured the dramatic essence of the story, telescoping its five acts into three.

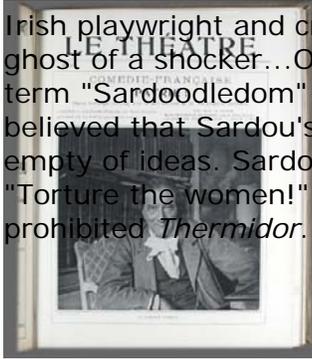
Sardou's later plays tended to have an historical setting. *La Tosca*, for example, takes place in Rome while the Battle of Marengo (14 June 1800) is being fought in the Piedmont between Napoleon and the Austrians. The opera premiered in Rome in 1900, exactly 100 years after the action of the story takes place there.



**The Battle of Marengo**

## Victorien Sardou's Legacy

Irish playwright and critic George Bernard Shaw said of *La Tosca*: "Such an empty-headed ghost of a shocker... Oh, if it had but been an opera!" He also came up with the dismissive term "Sardoodledom" in a review of Sardou plays (*The Saturday Review*, 1 June 1895). Shaw believed that Sardou's contrived dramatic machinery was creaky and that his plays were empty of ideas. Sardou's advice to young playwrights on how to be successful was to "Torture the women!" as part of any play construction. Georges Clemenceau even once prohibited *Thermidor*.



After producer Sir Squire Bancroft saw the dress rehearsal for *Fedora*, he said in his memoirs "In five minutes the audience was under a spell which did not once abate throughout the whole acts. Never was treatment of a strange and dangerous subject more masterly, never was acting more superb than Sarah showed that day." William Winter (author) said of *Fedora* "the distinguishing characteristic of this drama is carnality."

In New Orleans, during the period when much of its upper class still spoke French, Antoine Alciatore, founder of the famous old restaurant Antoine's, invented a dish called Eggs Sardou in honor of the playwright's visit to the city.



**Sarah Bernhardt**

## ABOUT THE LIBRETTISTS

### Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Puccini's partnership with the playwright/librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa was one of the most successful in the history of Italian opera -- a meeting of great artistic minds akin to Verdi's association with Boito and Bellini's with Romani. Although Illica and Giacosa are best remembered for their work with Puccini, each had an active career of his own.



Front cover of the original 1899 libretto

### Luigi Illica (1857-1919)



had a rough beginning. At an early age he ran away to sea and in 1876 he found himself among the Turks. Three years later, however, he moved to the relatively peaceful Milan, Italy, and there began his literary career, including a collection of prose plays.

He began writing librettos in 1889. **While his work on three of Puccini's operas is recognized as his chief contribution to the field**, he also wrote librettos for several other composers, including those for Giordano's *Andrea Chenier* (1896--the same year as *La Bohème*), an opera still popular and performed today, and two operas of Mascagni.

### Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906)



Giacosa began his professional life, not as a writer, but as a lawyer. He graduated from Turin University and immediately joined his father's firm in Milan. He moved into the literary world, however, when his one-act verse comedy, *Una partita a scacchi*, became a popular success. From 1888-1894 Giacosa held the chair of literature and drama at the Milan Conservatory.

**The publisher, Giulio Ricordi, organized the Puccini/Illica/Giacosa partnership in 1893.** The head of the most powerful publishing firm in Italy during the 19th century, Ricordi had the ability to make or break any young composer who came along, much in the same way that a CEO of a major record label can do today.

Having taken Puccini under his wing, Ricordi was intent on hiring the best writers to work with the young composer on his *La Bohème* -- he found them in Illica and Giacosa. The three had a very clear division of responsibilities when working together: it was Illica's job to plan the scenario (i.e., the opera's plan, and division into acts and scenes) and to draft the dialogue; next, Giacosa transformed the prose into polished verse; finally Puccini set this verse to music. This collaboration was such a success that the three worked together (dividing the responsibilities in the same way) on two other operas: *Tosca* (1900) and *Madama Butterfly* (1904).

The collaboration ended with the death of Giacosa in 1906. Puccini continued to discuss the idea of translating the story of Marie Antoinette into an operatic setting with Illica, but this project never came to fruition. For his final operas, Puccini turned to other librettists.

## 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.

"The work comes into the world at an undetermined hour, from a still unknown, but it comes inevitably."

"I shall feel it as an Italian, with desperate passion."



"Who sent you to me? God?"

- after hearing then-unknown Enrico Caruso sing *Recondita armonia* for the first time

"Inspiration is an awakening, a quickening of all man's faculties, and it is manifested in all high artistic achievements. "

## MUSICAL ANALYSIS



**Tosca begins on an imposing, quasi-tragic note, much darker than the opening pages of Puccini's earlier operas.** However, the composer takes care to introduce the Sacristan, a *basso buffo*, for comic relief. Puccini was always very careful to include well-defined minor characters. The sacristan's banter with Mario gradually leads to the aria "Recondita armonia". This piece requires vocal intensity and extension, together with depth of interpretation from the tenor, and is enriched by the Sacristan's counter-melody.

Angelotti returns to the scene and the music darkens; but with Tosca's entrance and the duet "Non la sospiri la nostra casetta", a lighter note returns, with orchestral timbres very near to elements of French impressionist music. When Angelotti is seen again, Puccini brings back a tragic atmosphere, of similar depth as in the first scenes; Angelotti is clearly the musical key of the tragedy, much more than Scarpia.

A nearly comic interlude features the sacristan and the chorus, creating an overall cheerful tone. This is immediately interrupted with the arrival of Scarpia, as the orchestra once more becomes deep and obscure, but with energy and power this time, conveying the overall power held by the police chief. Every accent and word of Scarpia is underscored by Puccini to depict a character with a depth of evil

comparable perhaps only to Iago in Verdi's *Otello*. The darkness of the orchestra continues throughout the scene of the search of the church. Upon Tosca's sudden arrival in the cathedral, the sinister nature of the music is toned down significantly, as Scarpia acts politely towards her. However, as Scarpia plays upon Tosca's jealousy, the music resumes that darkened tone for the rest of the act.

The episode of Cavaradossi's interrogation is written in a "conversational" musical style; it ends with an example of diegetic music, as Tosca sings a *cantata* – recalling the baroque tradition within the realist context of the opera.

Act III begins with an orchestral introduction, descriptive of the Roman countryside. The orchestral introduction to the shepherd boy's song ends with three brief repetitions in the lower registers of the chords, B-flat, A-flat, and E-major. While the rhythm is different, these are the same chords as Scarpia's familiar signature motif, a subtle foreshadowing that Scarpia's role in the drama is not over. The act includes the famous aria "E lucevan le stelle", and the opera's violent conclusion, to a brief *forte* restatement of the 'E lucevan...' theme.



Puccini at work

## LIST OF MUSICAL ITEMS

Act/Scene	Performed by	First lines	Principal arias/numbers in scene
<b>Act 1</b>			
1 Scene I	Angelotti	Ah! Finalmente! ( <i>Ah! At last!</i> )	
1 Scene II	Sacristan	E sempre lava! Ogni pennello è sozzo ( <i>Forever washing! And every brush is filthier</i> )	
1 Scene III	Cavaradossi, Sacristan	Che fai? ... Recito l'Angelus ( <i>What are you doing? Reciting the Angelus</i> )	Cavaradossi: Recondita armonia ( <i>Hidden harmony</i> )
1 Scene IV	Cavaradossi, Angelotti, voice of Tosca	Gente là dentro! ( <i>Someone is there!</i> )	
1 Scene V	Cavaradossi, Tosca	Mario! Mario! Mario!... Son qui! ( <i>Mario! Mario! Mario! ... I am here</i> )	Tosca: Non la sospiri, la nostra casetta ( <i>Do you not long for our little house</i> )
1 Scene VI	Cavaradossi, Angelotti	È buona la mia Tosca ( <i>She is good, my Tosca</i> )	
1 Scene VII	Sacristan, choruses of priests, pupils and singers	Sommo giubilo, Eccellenza! ( <i>Joyful news, Excellency!</i> )	
1 Scene VIII	Scarpia, Sacristan, Spoletta	Un tal baccano in chiesa! Bel rispetto! ( <i>Such a hubbub in church!</i> )	
1 Scene IX	Tosca, Scarpia, Sacristan, Chorus	Mario! Mario! ... Il pittor Cavaradossi? ( <i>Mario! Mario! ... The painter Cavaradossi?</i> )	Scarpia: Va, Tosca! ( <i>Go, Tosca!</i> )
<b>Act 2</b>			
2 Scene I	Scarpia, Sciarrone	Tosca è un buon falco! ( <i>Tosca is a good falcon!</i> )	Scarpia: Ha più forte sapore la conquista violenta ( <i>For myself the violent conquest</i> )
2 Scene II	Scarpia, Spoletta, Sciarrone, offstage voices of Tosca and chorus	O galantuomo, come andò la caccia? ( <i>Well, my fine man, how did the hunt go?</i> )	
2 Scene III	Cavaradossi, Scarpia, Spoletta	Tal violenza! ... Cavalier, vi piaccia accomodarvi	

		(Such violence! ... Cavalier, please be seated)	
<b>2 Scene IV</b>	<b>Scarpia, Tosca, Cavaradossi, Sciarrone, Spoletta</b>	Eccola ... Mario? tu qui? (Here she is ... Mario? You here?)	
<b>2 Scene V</b>	<b>Tosca, Scarpia, Spoletta</b>	Salvatelo! ... Io? Voi! (Save him! ... I? You, rather!)	Scarpia: Già, mi dicon venal (Yes, they say that I am venal) Tosca: Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore (I lived for art, I lived for love)
<b>Act 3</b>			
<b>3 Scene I</b>	<b>Voice of a Shepherd</b>	Io de' sospiri (I give you sighs)	Shepherd: Io de' sospiri
<b>3 Scene II</b>	<b>Jailer, Cavaradossi, Sergeant, Chorus (soldiers)</b>	Mario Cavaradossi? A voi (Mario Cavaradossi? For you)	Cavaradossi: E lucevan le stelle (And the stars shone)
<b>3 Scene III</b>	<b>Tosca, Cavaradossi</b>	Ah! Franchigia a Floria Tosca (Ah! A safe-conduct for Floria Tosca)	Cavaradossi: O dolce mansuete e pure (Oh, sweet hands pure and gentle)
<b>3 Finale</b>	<b>Jailer, Cavaradossi, Tosca, Sciarrone, Spoletta, confused voices</b>	L'ora! ... Son pronto (It s time ... I am ready)	



**Carvadossi painting while  
the sacristan looks on**



**Carvadossi kissing Tosca**



**Scarpia offering  
holy water to Tosca**



**Tosca after stabbing  
Scarpia**



**Cavaradossi in front of  
The firing squad**

# TEN THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT *TOSCA*

**1. The first English-language production of the play *La Tosca* opened in New York in 1889 and starred American actor-manager Fanny Davenport in the title role. In 1891, Sarah Bernhardt performed the play (in French) successfully throughout America. The English version created a storm of protest. Respectable women were shocked by the scenes described as "scenes that could not be elaborated without constant fear of public scandal." Tosca's suicide was the last straw for New Yorkers, and after the first performance the play was changed: instead of leaping to her death, she was shot by the soldier. The librettists also disliked the suicide, and an alternate ending for the opera was written: rather than leap, Tosca would go mad, collapse, and die on the body of her lover (Sudden Operatic Death Syndrome).**



Sarah Bernhardt as Floria Tosca

**2. Although Floria Tosca is supposed to be a beloved Roman opera star, in reality it had been illegal for women to appear on the operatic stage in the papal capital from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until 1798-about three years before *Tosca* is set.** Roles written for women singers, and performed by them in other parts of Italy, were taken in Rome by castratos (male sopranos and altos surgically altered before adolescence so that their voices did not break). Star castratos like Marchesi and Velluti were wildly popular with the Roman opera-going public. Moralistic revolutionaries banned the castratos when the Roman Republic took over in 1798. After the fall of the Republic in 1799, the castratos returned, but the women stayed, thus allowing singers like Floria Tosca to make their Rome debuts.

**3. Although *Tosca* is the most famous of all "Roman" operas, none of the three major characters is Roman. For his play *La Tosca*, Sardou, who was careful about historical details (though often wildly inaccurate about other things), made his heroine a Venetian subject, an orphan from the city of Verona.** He had a dreadful time finding a last name for her, and the one he settled on, "Tosca," is in fact a given name-there is a church of Saint Tosca in Verona. Another factor in the French playwright's choice of a name might have been the title of an opera that was popular during the French Revolution: *La Lodoiska*, set to music by Cherubini and others, and performed in Rome under the Roman Republic of 1798-99.

**4. Sardou's hero, Mario Cavaradossi, is not even Italian by birth: he is supposed to have been born in Paris, and is visiting Rome for the first time in 1800.** His father was a Roman of noble birth who left Italy as a young man and married a granddaughter of the Swiss-French *philosophe*, Helvetius. Sardou, who took a great deal of trouble over the names of his characters, seems to have decided on this five-syllable name partly because it sounds rather like that of the famous painter Caravaggio; partly because it recalls Caracciolo, a Neapolitan admiral executed in 1798 for his pro-French activities; and perhaps because it is very like a noble Genoese name, Caravadossi, one of whose members was active in the Italian wars of independence in the mid-nineteenth century.

**5. A 1900 production of Puccini's *Tosca* at the Opéra Bastille in Paris changed the character of Scarpia-in Sardou's play a Sicilian police official-into a Cardinal.** The change showed him putting on his vestments for the Te Deum while singing his first-act aria. The change was a shocking idea, and historically absurd-Rome was not ruled by the Church in June of 1900. The characterization is in fact consonant with the bitter anti-clericalism that was typical of popular theater at the time when Sardou, and later Puccini, were writing.



Pierre Berton as Baron Scarpia

**6. There actually is a "hiding place" in one of the chapels at Sant'Andrea della Valle. The first chapel on the left from the main entrance, the Barberini chapel, conceals in the street wall a shallow little chamber separated from the chapel proper by an ironwork grill.** This is a shrine to Saint Sebastian, marking the spot where a pious Christian woman named Lucina found the entrance to the city's sewers that led her to the body of the martyr Sebastian, later buried outside the city walls in the catacomb that bears his name. It is no doubt a coincidence that the only image of the Magdalene in the church is in this Barberini chapel. It is a statue rather than a painting (like Cavaradossi's) but she is a typical Magdalene, beautiful, penitent, and half-naked with her breasts covered only by her hair and by a strategically placed cross.

**7. During the time at which *Tosca* is set, the real city of Rome was occupied by an Allied force of Neapolitans, Austrians, Russians, Turks, and English, all at war with Republican France.** Although stage directors today often insert cowardly clerics into scenes in the opera that feature police oppression, at the time when the opera is set, there was actually no ecclesiastical government in Rome. The elderly Pope (Pius VI) had been exiled from Rome in February 1798, dragged across Europe for a year and a half, and died in Valence, France on August 29, 1799. Although a treaty had been arranged whereby the newly elected Pope, Pius VII, would arrive to take over his city in early July 1800, in June the Neapolitans were still trying their best to keep control of Rome.

**8. The character of Cesare Angelotti was based in part upon a sleazy Roman politician named Liborio Angelucci who, like Angelotti, was a "Consul of the late Roman Republic."** Angelucci, a physician and sometime obstetrician, was typical of the Republicans in late 18<sup>th</sup> century Rome, most of whom were middle-class professionals, or the sons of nobles, or intellectual and idealistic churchmen. He had an excellent reputation as a medical man and as a scholar, but he was often in political hot water. In 1794 he was arrested for taking part in a conspiracy against the papal government and was held for a while in the Castel Sant'Angelo; in 1797 he was in trouble again, this time accused of plotting to murder the Pope. When the French took Rome, Angelucci became one of the consuls (executives) of the Roman Republic. Unfortunately, he seems to have been primarily interested in enriching himself and his family. He was attacked in the Republican press as a thief and a false patriot and forced to resign.

**9. Puccini's sense of humour was often of the schoolboy variety, and he found risqué musical puns irresistible.** In Act II of the opera, after Spoletta has assured Scarpia that "everything is ready" for the execution of Cavaradossi, the Chief of Police turns to Tosca and softly asks, "Ebbene?"-"Well?" She says nothing, and the score tells us that she indicates her submission by nodding her head. But at her silent reply the orchestra, anticipating the two-note theme of the "execution" motif, plays the two-note phrase, A and C, or in Italian *soffeggio*, La and Do. The syllables, in addition to being musical symbols, also happen to be words in Italian: the words "La do" mean "I'm giving it," and it is the usual way for women to say, I'm ready to give "it" (to you).

**10. The news of Bonaparte's surprise victory over the Allies really did reach Rome in much the way that we see it in the opera.** By mid-day on Tuesday, June 17, the Roman diarist Galimberti noted with satisfaction that "the French are beaten by General Melas, who has re-taken Milan." Galimberti reports that the Jacobins (that is, Roman Republicans like Cavaradossi) "laughed and behaved insolently on hearing this news." However, late that night he added a coda to his diary entry: "The official notices about Austrian victories over the French in Italy. . . have been amended." A second courier had arrived in the city late on the night of June 17-18 with news of Bonaparte's surprising victory. Men like Cavaradossi went wild: "[They] gathered in the fields around the Castel Sant'Angiolo [sic], dancing the Carmagnole [a revolutionary ditty], playing and singing. They got nearer and nearer the fortress; a sentry on the walls challenged them but they just kept singing, so he fired on them and they moved away."



**Napoleon Crossing the Alps**

## 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 execution of Cavaradossi at the end of Act 3. Soldiers fire, as Tosca looks away**

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.**

# TOSCA AND RELIGION

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*



**Punch cartoon depicting the end of Sardou's *La Tosca*, 1888**

Puccini's *Tosca* is based on a play by French playwright and political satirist, Victorien Sardou (1831-1908), entitled *La Tosca*. **Sardou's play, with five acts and 23 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 *La 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*

Not surprisingly then, **Puccini presents *Tosca* as a very religious woman.** He depicts her leaving flowers on the altar 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 III of *Tosca*.



The *Te Deum* scene which concludes Act 1; Scarpia stands to left

**The *Te Deum* utilized by Puccini is an actual liturgical melody.** 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.



Tosca reverently lays a crucifix on Scarpia's body



The Castel Sant' Angelo, (right), scene of the *Tosca* denouement, as painted in the 18th century

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 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

## RELATED TOPICS OF STUDY



**Maria Callas (December 2, 1923 to September 16, 1977) was an American-born and one of the most renowned opera singers of the 20th century.** Her personal tragedy have often overshadowed Callas the artist in the popular press. Her artistic achievements were such that Leonard Bernstein called her "The Bible of the opera" because of her influence so enduring that, in 2006, *Opera News* wrote of her: "Nearly thirty years after her death, she's still the definition of the diva as artist--and still one of the greatest singing vocalists."

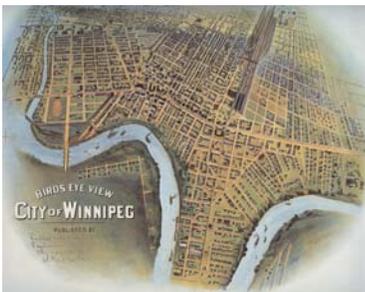
**One of Maria Callas's most celebrated roles was that of Tosca, the prima donna of French-besieged Rome, a figure of heroic passions and beauty.** An earlier recording of Puccini's melodrama, made with Tito Gobbi in August 1953, has long been a standard of dramatic excellence among opera discs. It was once remarked that "Callas *is* Tosca".



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZXwz0gj5fY>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8IAciATozQ&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8IAciATozQ&NR=1)

**What was happening in Winnipeg when *Tosca* premiered in 1900? Winnipeg was in the midst of its greatest period of growth. It grew from 8,000 in 1881 to almost 26,000 in 1891 and then to 42,000 by 1901. Then came a decade of explosive growth that took the population to 128,000 by 1911.**



Its magnificent station on Logan Ave (now the Aboriginal Centre of the University of Manitoba) was under construction on the Royal Alexandra Hotel which opened in 1906. The Grand Trunk Pacific built their Union Station on Main Street in 1909. The Manitoba Club and the Manitoba Club both opened their doors in 1904 and the Walker Theatre of Winnipeg built three new firehalls in 1904, befitting the needs of the city. The city built three new firehalls in 1904, befitting the needs of the city on Maple Street, Number 5 on Sherbrook Street and Number 6 on the following year a new Carnegie Library at 380 William. Not to be outdone, the city face built its Hôtel de Ville, Fire Station Number One, the Post Office and the City Hall in this decade. The YMCA building on Portage Avenue (old Birks Store) was built in 1900. The province opened the Land Titles Building on Broadway in 1904 and the both the Normal School on William Avenue and the Manitoba Agricultural College (later Fort Osborne) in Tuxedo in 1906. The Federal Government built a huge immigration building (demolished in 1975) capable of housing over 500 immigrants on Maple Street, beside the Canadian Pacific Station, and the Customs Examining Building on McDermot. Among the commercial buildings completed in the 1900s, the most prominent were the Union Bank (Royal Bank) Building on Main Street in 1904, the Eaton's store and the Eaton's catalogue building which were completed in 1906, the Grain Exchange Building which opened in 1908 and the old Bank of Nova Scotia at Portage and Garry in 1910. Among religious buildings, Augustine United Church, St. Luke's Anglican Church, McDermot Avenue Baptist Church and the Trappist Monastery in St. Norbert were all built at this time. Now that's a building boom!

**As Winston Churchill, who visited Winnipeg in 1901 noted, "Fancy, 20 years ago there were only a few mud huts-tents: and last night a magnificent audience of men in evening dress & ladies half out of it, filled a fine opera house...Winnipeg has a wonderful future before it."**

# THE OPERATIC VOICE & PROFESSIONAL SINGING



**Operatic singing, which was developed in Europe during the 17th century, places far greater vocal demands on an opera singer than on any other type of singing. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must develop their voices to make a sound that will project and be heard above an orchestra and be heard throughout a large theatre.**

**After years of practice and study, an opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device.** By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm (a muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach) the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. The diaphragm expands and contracts, regulating the air that passes through the vocal cords, which, in turn, causes them to vibrate. The speed at which the cords vibrate determines the pitch. As the sound passes through the mouth, it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. These cavities act as small echo chambers and help amplify the sound. The shape of the mouth and the placement of the tongue near the lips contribute to the tone and sound of the words.

**Many singers begin their operatic training in university.** Opera students study singing, music history, composition and vocal pedagogy (voice teaching). In addition to music classes, they study diction and often study at least one foreign language. After university, singers begin to work in the professional world. Their first roles are usually small parts, but if they continue to study and train, they may move on to the bigger principal roles.

**Professional singers develop a number of roles in their repertoire.** Since the principal artists are required to have their parts memorized before rehearsals begin, singers must prepare well in advance of each contract. Singers have voice teachers who help them refine their singing techniques and many will also have an acting coach. Even a well established singer will have a vocal coach to teach singing and acting techniques for specific roles.

**Each person's vocal tract is constructed differently.** The roles that a singer performs are dependent mostly upon their vocal range, but within the vocal ranges, there are many colours and weights of voice that further determine which roles he or she can sing safely. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

**After the role has been studied intensely and the singer is hired to perform, they arrive at the opera company for the rehearsals.** This time is spent refining the music with the conductor and staging the action with the stage director. Each director has a different idea of how the character should be played, and each conductor has a different idea of how the character should sound, therefore the singer must modify his or her techniques to reach the desired result.

**Physical health is a major priority to a singer.** Contrary to popular belief, not all opera singers are overweight. Conventional wisdom used to state that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice however, in recent years, people have discovered that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. Plus, the overall health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers, like professional athletes try to avoid such substances as tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.

## Vocal Categories

### WOMEN:

**Soprano:** The highest female voice, similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

**Mezzo-Soprano:** The middle-range female voice, similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers and even the part of a young man (trouser role).

**Contralto:** The lowest female voice, similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually play unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches and older women. Not very common.

### MEN:

**Tenor:** The highest male voice, similar to a trumpet in range, tone color and acoustical "ring." Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

**Baritone:** The middle-range male voice, similar to a French horn in tone color. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

**Bass:** The lowest male voice, similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone color. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

The vocal parts overlap each other. The notes that are high for baritone to sing are low for a tenor. The notes that are low for a baritone to sing are high for a bass. For this reason you may see a high range mezzo-soprano singing a soprano's role or a low range baritone singing a bass' role.

The following terms can be used to describe special characteristics in a vocal range:

**Coloratura:** A light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

**Lyric:** A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies.

**Dramatic:** Dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing.

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

## GLOSSARY: IMPORTANT WORDS IN OPERA



**Act-** a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

**Aria-** means "air" in Italian. This is a piece of music written for a one singer (soloist), usually with instrumental accompaniment.

**Aside-** a secret comment from an actor directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

**Baritone-** the middle singing range of the male voice.

**Bass-** the lowest singing range of the male voice.

**Basso buffo** (Italian)- a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

**Basso profondo** (Italian)- the most serious bass voice.

**Baton-** short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

**Bel Canto-** Italian phrase literally meaning "beautiful singing." A traditional

Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique. Also refers to the operas written in this style.

**Blocking-** directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

**Bravo-** (Italian)- a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, Bravo refers to a male performer, Brava refers to a female performer and Bravi refers to many performers.

**Buffo-** from the Italian for "buffoon." A singer of comic roles (basso-buffo) or a comic opera (opera-buffa.)

**Cadenza-** a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off the singer's vocal ability.

**Castrato-** (Italian)- a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

**Choreographer-** the person who designs the steps of a dance.

**Chorus-** a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

**Classical-** the period in music which comes after the Baroque and before the Romantic, roughly from the birth of Mozart to shortly after the death of Beethoven. It represents the greatest standardization in orchestral form and tonality.

**Coloratura-** elaborate ornamentation of music written for a singer using many fast notes and trills. Also used to describe a singer who sings this type of music.

**Composer-** the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

**Comprimario-** (Italian)- a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

**Contralto-** the lowest female voice range.

**Conductor-** the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers.

**Countertenor-** a male singer with the highest male voice range, generally singing within the female contralto or mezzo soprano range.

**Crescendo-** a build in the volume or dynamic of the music.

**Cue-** a signal to enter or exit from the stage, to move or to change lighting or scenery; or a signal given by the conductor to the musicians.

**Curtain Call-** occurs at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

**Designer-** a production can have two or three designers: a lighting designer, a costume designer, a set designer, or someone who is both costume and set designer. They work closely with the stage director to give the production a distinctive look.

**Diva-** literally, "goddess" in Italian. An important female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

**Dress Rehearsal-** the final rehearsal before opening night, includes costumes, lights, makeup, etc. Sometimes it is necessary to stop for adjustments, but an attempt is made to make it as much like a regular performance as possible.

**Duet-** music that is written for two people to sing together.



**Encore-** a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. An encore is usually performed because the audience wants to hear more music even though the concert is over.

**Ensemble-** a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

**Falsetto-** the upper part of a voice in which the vocal cords do not vibrate completely. Usually used by males to imitate a female voice.

**Finale-** the last musical number of an opera or an act.

**Grand Opera-** spectacular French opera of the Romantic period, lavishly staged, with a historically-based plot, a huge cast, an unusually-large orchestra, and ballet. It also refers to opera without spoken dialogue.

**Helden-** German prefix meaning "heroic". Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in "heldentenor."

**House-** the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

**Impresario-** the proprietor, manager, or conductor of an opera or concert company; one who puts on or sponsors an entertainment; manager, producer.

**Interlude-** a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

**Intermission-** a break between acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.

**Librettist-** the writer of the opera's text. Libretto- Italian for "little book." It is the text or story of the opera.

**Lyric-** used to describe a light to medium weight voice with an innocent quality, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects.

**Maestro-** means "master" in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor (male or female).

**Mark-** to sing, but not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer's voice so most performers mark during rehearsals. During the Dress Rehearsal singers try to sing at full voice for part if not all of the rehearsal.

**Mezzo-soprano-** the middle singing range for a female voice.

**Motif or Leitmotif-** a recurring musical theme used to identify an emotion, person, place, or object.

**Opera-** a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Like a play, an opera is acted on stage with costumes, scenery, makeup, etc. Opera is the plural form of the Latin word opus, which means "work".

**Opera buffa-** (Italian)- an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the eighteenth century.

**Opera seria-** (Italian)- a serious opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

**Opera-comique-** (French) or Singspiel (German)- a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

**Operetta-** lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

**Orchestra-** an ensemble, led by a conductor, that is comprised of string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

**Orchestra pit-** sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

**Overture-** an orchestral introduction to the opera played before the curtain rises. Usually longer than a prelude and can be played as a separate piece.

**Pitch-** how high or low a note sounds.

**Prelude-** a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

**Prima Donna-** literally, "first lady" in Italian. The leading woman in an opera. Because of the way some of them behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding fashion. The term for a leading man is primo uomo.

**Principal-** a major singing role, or the singer who performs such a role.

**Production-** the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights etc.

**Props-** objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

**Proscenium-** the front opening of the stage which frames the action.

**Quartet-** four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc.

**Raked Stage-** a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.



**Recitative**- lines of dialogue that are sung, usually with no recognizable melody. It is used to advance the plot.

**Rehearsal**- a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

**Score**- the written music of an opera or other musical work.

**Serenade**- a piece of music honouring someone or something, an extension of the traditional performance of a lover beneath the window of his mistress.

**Soprano**- the highest range of the female singing voice.

**Soubrette**- (French)- pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

**Spinto**- (Italian)- a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

**Stage Areas**- refers to the various sections of the stage as seen by those on stage.

**Stage Director**- the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer and wig and make-up artists to make his or her vision into reality.

**Stage Manager**- the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance.

**Supernumeraries**- (Supers)- appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

**Surtitles**- the English translations of the opera's language, in this production Italian, that are projected above the stage during a performance to help the audience follow the story. Much like subtitles in a foreign film.

**Synopsis**- a short summary of the story of the opera.

**Tableau**- occurs at the end of a scene or act, when all cast members on stage freeze in position and remain that way until the curtain closes. It looks as though that moment has been captured in a photograph.

**Tempo**- speed of the music.

**Tenor**- the highest natural adult male voice.

**Trill**- very quick alternation between two adjacent notes. See coloratura.

**Trio**- an ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

**Trouser role**- the role of an adolescent boy or young man, written for and sung by a woman, often a mezzosoprano. Also known as a pants role.

**Verismo**- describes a realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the 19th century.



## What is a sitzprobe??

Pronounced "zits-probe" this German word is not what you may think! It is the name given to the type of rehearsal that is held the first day of moving on to the main stage. For the first time, the principals and chorus are together with the Maestro and the orchestra. The entire opera is sung through without any costumes or blocking. This gives everyone a chance to check the ensemble and balance between the singing and the orchestra (remember, up until now rehearsals have been accompanied by piano.)

# 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**.

# AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE



The following list will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of a night at the opera:

- Dress to be comfortable. Many people enjoy dressing up in formal attire.
- Arrive on time. Latecomers disturb the singers and others in the audience. Latecomers will only be seated at suitable breaks - often not until intermission.
- Find your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher.
- Remove your hat. This is customary and is respectful to the artists and to people sitting behind you.
- Turn off cell phones, ipods, pagers, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- Leave your camera at home. A flash can be very disturbing to the artists and audience members.
- Save all conversations, eating and drinking, and chewing gum, for the intermission. Talking and eating can be disruptive to other audience members and distracts from your ability to be absorbed by the show. The audience is critical to the success of the show – without you, there can be no performance.
- Settle in and get comfortable before the performance begins. Read your program before the performance – rustling through the program during the show can disrupt everyone.
- Clap as the lights are dimmed and the conductor appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the conductor then turns to the orchestra and takes up his or her baton to signal the beginning of the opera.
- Listen to the prelude or overture before the curtain rises. It is part of the performance. It is an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- Read the English surtitles projected above the stage.
- Sit still during the performance. Only whisper when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- Applaud (or shout Bravo!) at the end of an aria or chorus piece to show your enjoyment. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- Laugh when something is funny – this is a performance and you are expected to respond!
- Listen for subtleties in the music. The tempo, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the “feeling” or “sense” of the action or character.
- Notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.
- **Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!!!**

# WHAT'S IN A REVIEW? LET'S REVIEW



Enrico Caruso in *Tosca* as Cavaradossi. Passed over for the role at the premiere, he sang it many times subsequently

Being a music critic has its rewards -- but it also has its drawbacks. On one hand, you get to go to lots of concerts -- and you get in free. On the other hand, you can't just sit back and enjoy the listening experience. You spend most of the time analyzing, evaluating and scribbling notes about what you're hearing and seeing.

## Star Ratings

One especially difficult part of the job is deciding the star ratings. Reviewers are required to rate performances on a five-star scale, five being the highest rating.

## Criteria

**Musical interpretation and expression:** Did the soloist/ensemble project and capture the spirit of the work?

**Technical execution:** Was this an accurate, well prepared performance?

**Creativity and originality:** Did the conductor/musicians bring their own personality to the work, possibly showing us something new?

**Programming:** Was this a well-balanced, cohesive combination of musical choices?

Quality/style of works: This applies especially to new works.

**Venue:** Was it suitable for the genre of show, offering good acoustics and sightlines?

**Costuming (in opera or some pops concerts):** Did they add authenticity and flair to the performance?

**Choreography (opera and some pops concerts):** Was it well done, creative and suitable?

**Demeanour:** Did the performers project personality, confidence, energy, etc. and connect with the audience?

**Atmosphere:** What was the overall feeling at this concert? Was it an event? Was there warmth, excitement, etc.?

**Introductory remarks:** Were they useful in giving us background that would enhance the listening experience or were they just lengthy lists of housekeeping items that detracted from the reason we were there?

## Considerations contributing to an overall rating

### Gut feeling

One thing we can't ignore, as human beings, is the gut feeling we get at a concert. This is the intuitive, perhaps partly emotional reaction to a performance. Every work and every performance contributes to the whole, and not until the end can one render a decision.

A great performance speaks to everybody ... If you put at the heart of an opera company the desire to serve the art form, and genuinely make it available and invite in the complete cross-section of society, then everything that company does comes somehow or other under the heading Education ... the skill to be taught in these programmes, throughout an opera house, to every audience and every sponsor, the skill we are in danger of losing, and the biggest threat to our own art form, is listening. It's the only door you need to open: how to listen.

- Graham Vick, CBE, Opera Director

# STUDENT ACTIVITIES

## Optional Activity #1 – A Review

### Step 1 – Think-Group-Share



Individually students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

1. What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
2. What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?
3. Would you have done something differently? Why?
4. What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
5. What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed.

### Step 2 – Class Discussion

Have the whole class examine the poster papers and discuss the different ideas from each group.

### Step 3 – Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including: a clearly stated purpose, a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern, a summary paragraph capturing the interest of the reader, precise nouns, revision for consistency of ideas. You might give your students a few samples of reviews for fine arts events from the newspaper as examples – or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the review outline worksheet below. Once this has been completed, students may write their rough draft.

1. Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)
2. Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)
3. Paragraph 1 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)
4. Paragraph 2 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)
5. Paragraph 3 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)
6. Summary/Closing Paragraph

### Step 4 - Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

### Step 5 - Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces up and organize them into a newspaper.



Rome circa 1900

## Optional Activity #2 – An early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Newspaper Review

Be a music critic in Italy. Students imagine they are living at the time of the first performance of *Tosca*.

### Step 1 - Historical Research

Students will need to learn about the historical context in Italy, around the time Puccini composed *Tosca*. They may want to learn more about what was happening in other art forms (e.g., literature and painting).

### Step 2 - Writing the Review

Students may want to create a newspaper in which their review is included. The review itself could incorporate quotes and/or headlines from actual historical reviews. The students' reviews can follow a similar outline to that for the activity above, but they must remember the time period in which they are writing. If they design a newspaper, they can try to use similar type styles (font) and page layout as were used in the 1900s.

## Optional Activity #3 – Write a Letter from One Character to Another

Choose a moment in the story and have one character write a letter to another.

## Optional Activity #4 – Create a Costume, Set, Poster, News Ad, Press Release or Biography



- **Sketch a costume** for a character in *Tosca*. The costume can be traditional or modern.
- **Draw a set** for a production of *Tosca*. The set can be traditional or modern.
- **Design a poster** for *Tosca* Student Night at the Opera, including the date, the time, and the people involved. The poster can be traditional or modern.
- **Create a newspaper ad** for *Tosca*. Include whatever you feel is the biggest "selling point" of the opera - what makes it exciting? Why should people come to see it?
- **Write a press release** about *Tosca* Student Night at the Opera, including the date, the time, the people involved, and why it would be exciting or fun to attend.
- **Write a biography** of one of the characters.

## Optional Activity #5 – *Tosca*: Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. Critics have referred to *Tosca* as both a thriller (in praise) and a shocker (in condemnation). What elements of a thriller does *Tosca* have? Compare it other popular entertainments in that category, including film and TV.

2. *Tosca*'s plot may be melodramatic and implausible. But the historical and political details are fairly accurate, and there is no shortage of political torture and police corruption in the world today. Discuss the relative weight of the believable and unbelievable in *Tosca*.

3. While Scarpia and Carvaradossi seem like melodramatic archetypes, Tosca herself lays some claim to complexity and “roundness” as a character. Discuss elements of her personality, its strengths and flaws, and especially her conflicting values and desires.

4. The most famous aria in *Tosca*, “Vissi d’arte,” is distinctive in several ways. It occurs dead centre in the opera. It stops the action cold. It is Tosca’s only real moment of self-reflection and self-revelation. And it was an afterthought, added at the last minute. Discuss this aria. What does it tell us about Tosca? Is she being honest with us, and with herself? Are the aria’s inclusion and placement dramatically valid?

## Optional Activity #6 – Background: Questions for Discussion and Writing

### 1. History:

a) 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.



The Colosseum

b) 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.



Rome 1800

**2. Geography:** 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.

**3. Government:** 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?

**4. Science:** 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?

Manitoba Opera would love to receive a copy of any activities produced by the students.  
Please forward them to the attention of:

**Sally Sweatman, Education & Outreach Coordinator**  
**Manitoba Opera**

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# Opera Comprehension Tests

## General Opera

1. \_\_\_\_\_ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ The lowest male vocal range.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The female vocal range lying between soprano and contralto.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ The highest female vocal range.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ A song for two voices.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ The lowest female vocal range.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ The Italian word meaning "little book."
11. \_\_\_\_\_ The middle male vocal range.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ He/she has the artistic view for the performance of the opera.

## *Tosca*

1. *Tosca* was first performed in the year \_\_\_\_\_ .
2. Name an historical event that occurred during Puccini's lifetime \_\_\_\_\_.
3. *Tosca* takes place in \_\_\_\_\_ (location & date).
4. The opera *Tosca* is based on a literary work by \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The libretto for *Tosca* was written by \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The role of Scarpia is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (name the singing voice)
7. The role of Tosca is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (name t
8. The role of Carvaradossi is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (voice).

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**ETC....EGGS SARDOU**



**Eggs Sardou** is made with poached eggs, artichoke bottoms, Hollandaise or Bechamel sauce and creamed spinach (optional). It is on the menu of many Creole restaurants in New Orleans, including Antoine's, where Eggs Sardou was invented. This dish was created by Antoine on the occasion of a dinner he hosted for the French Playwright Victorien Sardou, who was a guest in New Orleans at the time. Sardou's plays were highly sought after as librettos for operas. Irish playwright and critic George Bernard Shaw said of Sardou's *La Tosca*: "Such an empty-headed ghost of a shocker...Oh, if it had but been an opera!"

**General Preparation** Cooked fresh spinach is creamed with a Bechamel or Hollandaise sauce. A drop or two of Tabasco sauce is added. The artichoke bottoms are warmed in a 175-degree oven for five to ten minutes. The Eggs Sardou are assembled by placing spoonfuls of the warm creamed spinach on a warmed plate. The artichoke bottoms are placed on top of the creamed spinach and the poached eggs are set inside the artichoke bottoms. The assembly is then covered in the Hollandaise sauce. Some cooks omit nutmeg and cloves from the Bechamel sauce when using it to cream spinach for Eggs Sardou. The Eggs Sardou served at Antoine's Restaurant include truffles, ham and anchovies. Other restaurants typically omit one or more of these three ingredients.

**Serving** Eggs Sardou should be served at once, while the spinach, artichokes, poached eggs and sauce are still warm. For this reason, a warmed plate or bowl is recommended in most recipes. The garnish may be anything from crumbled bacon or a small dice of ham to a simple sprinkle of paprika. If Eggs Sardou are served as an appetizer, no side dishes are needed. If it is served at brunch, or as an entree, the side dishes should be such that they do not overpower the muted, carefully blended flavors of the eggs, spinach and sauce. If wine is to be served, it should be white, preferably a slightly sweet white wine.



## **EGGS SARDOU** **Antoine's Restaurant**

2 warm cooked artichoke hearts  
4 anchovy fillets  
2 hot poached eggs  
1/3 cup Hollandaise Sauce  
1 tablespoon chopped ham  
2 slices truffle

Place the hot artichoke hearts on a serving dish. Criss-cross two anchovy fillets over each. Put a poached egg on each artichoke heart. Pour the Hollandaise Sauce over the two eggs. Sprinkle the chopped ham over the two eggs and garnish each with a truffle slice. Serve immediately.



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