

TOSCA'S PRISM

Three Moments of Western Cultural History

Edited by
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and Agostino Ziino

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To the memories of William Laird Kleine-Ahlbrandt, colleague, contributor to this volume, and lover of *Tosca*, and Dr. Murray Burton, without whom this project would not have happened.

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Forewords

The events set forth in Victorien Sardou's play *La Tosca* take place in Rome in the year 1800. Puccini's opera on the same subject was given its première in Rome 1900. What, therefore, could be more appropriate than an international conference devoted to both (but with the opera in pride of place) in 2000, again in the Eternal City? This volume was derived from the proceedings of that conference.

Tosca, like Verdi's *Il trovatore*, is the centerpiece of a triad of works that, to this day, forms one of the main pillars of the world's operatic repertory; and, like *Il trovatore*, it has always aroused strong feelings, whether for or against. From its outset an opera of action (no need here for Sardou's long conversation between two minor characters to put the audience in the picture), it nevertheless finds room for jewels of lyrical reflection such as the arias "Recondita armonia," "Vissi d'arte," and "E lucevan le stelle," not to mention, by way of an act prelude, a tone poem distilled from the chimes of distant bells.

In this volume, scholars from both sides of the Atlantic explore the subject from every angle: the political background to the events described, with special reference to the image of Napoleon both then and later; the current of anti-clericalism that persisted in Puccini's Italy, the characterization of the principals in play and opera; the various literary threads from which the libretto is woven. There are important analytical studies of the music in relation both to contemporary theory and practice; nor are the composer's links with his ancestral past forgotten. Also touched upon are *Tosca* productions through the ages.

All this should help the reader to a fuller understanding and appreciation of a masterwork which, despite the abuse

FOREWORDS

hurled at it from certain academic circles, has never lost its hold on the public, nor is it ever likely to do so.

Julian Budden, President,
Centro Studi Giacomo Puccini, Lucca, Italy

* * * *

With very great pleasure and pride I write these few words of introduction to the volume *Tosca's Prism*, created from the proceedings of the international conference *Tosca 2000*, celebrating the centennial of *Tosca*, an opera by my grandfather, which had its birth in Rome and which went on to see great success. My grandfather often visited Rome and saw many operas, including his own, at the Teatro dell'Opera, where *Tosca* had its premiere and where *Tosca 2000* took place. I add my voice to those of the dedicated specialists represented in this volume celebrating this great work of art.

I also find reason for much pride and emotion in the fact that attention is finally being paid here to Domenico Puccini, the grandfather of my grandfather, who, during his life, never received the success he merited because of his death at a young age. He too was a great composer and his *Te Deum* is discussed in this volume, having been performed for the first time in the modern era during the conference. I would like to thank Deborah Burton, Susan Nicassio, and Agostino Ziino for organizing the conference *Tosca 2000* and Maestro Herbert Handt for the performance of the *Te Deum*, the manuscript of which remains a valued part of the Puccini legacy at the Museo Puccini at Torre del Lago and the Associazione degli Amici delle Case di Puccini.

Simonetta Puccini, President,
Istituto di Studi Pucciniani, Milan, Italy

Editors' Introduction

"We look upon Truth . . . by a refracted Ray, which makes it appear where it is not."

Norris, *Practical discourse*, 1691

Prisms refract light: they break its course, reflect and return it, producing iridescent images of a reality analyzed into its component parts. This symposium is an attempt to break the straight course, not of light, but of time: to reflect upon three diverse moments of European history—1800, 1900, and 2000—through the prism of Puccini's opera *Tosca*. The events of the story are to have taken place in June 1800; the Puccini opera premièred in January 1900; and the year 2000 will serve as the moment representative of our current vantage point.

Tosca is often characterized as an example of operatic "verismo" or "realism"—even though the "slice of life" depicted in the opera, as well as in the play by Victorien Sardou on which it was based, is hardly that of the Everyman (beloved of the Verists): divas, chiefs of police, and aristocratic, revolutionary artists are not the common folk. Yet the naturalistic dramaturgy and the references to actual historical events and personages lend it the intoxicating allure of reality. But wherein does this "reality" lie?

Before attempting to find that elusive grain of truth, we need to understand the extent of the problem. Try this quiz: which one of these quotations about Italian political upheavals circa 1800 comes from an authentic historical source?

- "My house was searched, my papers seized, ransacked. . . . But in my library, there were two volumes of Voltaire that a

traitor's hand had slipped in . . . for anyone who possesses a single work of Voltaire . . . three years in the galleys!"

- "Victory! Liberty is rising, the tyrants are falling!"
- "We are all Republican citizens! . . . Several rogues with guns . . . shouting 'Jacobin, Jacobin,' killed a poor priest . . . at the same time I could hear a bullet whistling past my head."

The first quotation is from the escaped prisoner Angelotti's autobiographical speech in the Sardou play (1887), explaining the political events that led to his imprisonment. The purpose of the speech is to generalize from the Neapolitan paranoia of c.1797 to Rome in the summer of 1800, a very different situation indeed, but a comforting assumption for republicans of Sardou's era. The second quotation is the hero Cavaradossi's reaction in the opera (1900) to Napoleon's victory at Marengo—a reference to a real battle transformed into an anachronistic appeal to Italian nationalism. The final quote—the "real" one—comes to us from Domenico Puccini, grandfather of Giacomo, who was in Naples during the revolutionary/counterrevolutionary chaos of 1799 and wrote to the family back in Lucca about the events he had witnessed. This letter, transcribed in its entirety and translated into English for the first time in this volume by Herbert Handt, reveals how close the elder Puccini came to death—in which case his grandson's opera *Tosca* might not have been written at all!

Like walking through a funhouse of distorting mirrors, this *Tosca* time-travel may show us one "fact" that turns out to be only a reflection of the truth. But, as the authors contributing to this volume show us all too clearly, the natures of the distortions of a Sardou, or a verismo librettist, reveal something of the "truth" of their own later time periods. Victorien Sardou, the author of the play, used traditional religion as a con-

trast to political liberalism; Puccini and his librettists, who put no more faith in political liberalism than they put in the Church, present both Church and State as hostile, and ultimately fatal, to the individual's futile struggle for happiness. Sardou's vision was, of course, colored by the struggles between Church and State that characterized the troubled French Third Republic, and looked back to the glory days of Napoleon; Puccini, Illica, and Giacosa premièred their new opera in Rome, the ancient seat of the popes that had recently been requisitioned as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy. Among these Frenchman and Italians, a fictional Rome was created that was corrupt and repressive, where dissent was met by torture and summary execution—a very different place from the real Rome of 1800. However, these distortions do not detract from our understanding, but rather create for us a more brilliant, polychromatic vision of the periods in question, including our modern one and its own underlying cultural assumptions.

The following essays—contributed by outstanding scholars in their fields of historical and musical scholarship—do not just shed light on the events and intellectual activities of 1800, 1900, and 2000: the focus on *Tosca* allows them to provide us with almost holographic, multidimensional images that reflect both forward and backward in time. The nexus of interlocking real and fictional events is quite startling, and does much to clarify the fascination that the highly political plot of the drama held for its French and Italian audiences. As Eugen Weber writes below: "When *La Tosca* the play opened in 1887, France was in turmoil. When the opera premiered in 1900, Italy was in turmoil. Beginning in the spring of 1898, severe disturbances roiled in the peninsula from north to south to north, in country and in town, culminating in Milan where eighty people died in June 1898 when the military opened fire

on a demonstration. . . . Puccini's *Tosca* opened in mid-January 1900, shortly before general elections produced impressive gains for the radical opposition, and just before one more prime minister resigned amid cries of "Down with the king!" And William Laird Kleine-Ahlbrandt observes, "[Sardou's] own father had seen Napoleon when the Emperor had returned from Elba. Sardou became fascinated with the history of this whole era and claimed that this passion started him on his life's work." One has only to glance at his play *La Tosca* to find prominent figures from history—the English diplomat and collector Sir William Hamilton and his wife, Emma, mistress of Lord Nelson; the composer Giovanni Paisiello; and Queen Maria Carolina of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, sister of Marie Antoinette and terror of the Neapolitan revolutionists.

Most astonishing of all, perhaps, is the coincidence that Giacomo Puccini's grandfather Domenico wrote a *Te Deum* to celebrate the French defeat at Genoa, which occurred a few days before the pivotal battle of Marengo, just as Giacomo included one in his opera's first act. Herbert Handt discusses this *Te Deum* and its performance history below.

Tosca's strong 1900 brew of church, state, and revolution did not arise in a vacuum either. The bitter hostility between anti-Christian French revolutionists and the Church they saw as the greatest bulwark of the old regime continued to strike responsive chords among modernists a century later. As John Anthony Davis writes below, "In 1891, [Pope Leo XIII's] famous encyclical *Rerum Novarum* explicitly committed the Catholic Church to the mission of reclaiming the souls of the European working classes from the materialist and atheist doctrines of liberalism and socialism. . . . Because supporters of the papacy were, in these years, also seen as potential enemies of the state and subject to the same repressive treatment as anarchists and socialists, it was only after the crisis came to

a close that clearer demarcations could be drawn. That conclusion came in 1900, the year when *Tosca* first appeared and the same year in which King Umberto I was assassinated by an anarchist."

This symposium is divided into three sections by period (c. 1800, c. 1900, and c. 2000); it combines musical and historical contributions under that chronological rubric. At the same time, the opera is examined in depth as an individual work of art, both technically and in its sociocultural context. Music scholars of our own period take the leap back to 1900 and try to illuminate Puccini's creation, both in light of current thinking and in comparison with the theoretical writings of his contemporaries. These essays include some important and exciting discoveries, such as Pier Giuseppe Gillio's contribution, which describes his unearthing of tantalizing sections of *Tosca's* libretto—even an alternative ending!—that had long been considered lost. It is our hope that an interdisciplinary approach such as this will help to create a variegated vision of the three moments of cultural history under our multi-lensed microscope, and will be of interest to historians, musicians, and opera lovers alike.

* * * *

This volume grew out of the international conference *Tosca 2000*, which took place in Rome at the Teatro dell'Opera (the location of *Tosca's* première in 1900), celebrating the centennial of that première and the bicentennial of the historical events on which the play and opera were based. It is more, though, than a coming together of scholars of different disciplines and cultures. This volume also represents the first—and so far only—collaboration of the two branches of Puccini scholarship: the Centro Studi Giacomo Puccini in Lucca and the Istituto di Studi Pucciniani in Milan. We are very pleased to have forewords from the presidents of both societies, Julian

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Budden and Simonetta Puccini, the latter of whom is also the composer's granddaughter. We are also grateful to Dr. Puccini and the Museo Puccini at Torre del Lago for access to the autograph of the *Te Deum* by Domenico Puccini and permission to give the work its first modern performance during the conference.

Deborah Burton
Susan Vandiver Nicassio
Agostino Ziino

Acknowledgments

"Writing is to be preferred before verbal conferences, as being freer from passions and tergiversations."

Archbishop John Bramhall (1594–1663)

The transmutation of the *Tosca* 2000 conference into the present book has required not only perseverance but percipience: a discernment of, and a belief in, what might become a reality. The protracted process of creating this written work made it necessary to exclude some of the more lively parts of the gathering: we could not reproduce herein the first modern performance of Domenico Puccini's *Te Deum*, the live rendition of the deleted scenes from Puccini's opera *Edgar* that were later adapted for *Tosca*, or the virtual reality *Tosca* created by Tito Schipa, Jr. For that matter, the ancient atmosphere of Rome turns out to be equally untranslatable into prose. More difficult was the decision to omit some of the papers that were very effective in a conference setting, but did not translate well into the written word. Our deep thanks—and apologies—go out to Conrad Donakowski, Michael Kaye, Jürgen Maehder, and Suzanne Scherr for their fine contributions to the event.

Neither this volume nor the conference could have come into existence without the support of the following institutions: the American Academy in Rome, the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali—Dipartimento per lo Spettacolo, the Società Italiana di Musicologia, the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, the Università degli Studi di Roma "Tor Vergata—Corso di Laurea in Storia, Scienze, e Tecniche della Musica e dello Spettacolo," the Comune di Roma—Assessorato alle Politiche Culturali, the Friends of the Humanities (Lafayette, Louisiana), and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, De-

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SCORE INDICATIONS

Throughout this book, references to musical scores will be abbreviated as follows: act/rehearsal number/measures after rehearsal number. So the opening measure of Act I would be referred to as I/0/0, while the first measure after rehearsal number 1 would be written as I/1/1. If a work is only one act long, or a single act is discussed in a chapter, the abbreviation would contain only two figures, such as 1/1, indicating the first measure after rehearsal number 1.

PART I

Circa 1800