

Tosca

Educational Study Guide



THE BASICS

Tosca

Premiered on January 14, 1900 at Teatro Costanzi in Rome, Italy

Music: Giacomo Puccini (1847-1906)

Libretto: Luigi Illica

Based on the play *La Tosca* by Victorien Sardou

***Tosca* contains adult themes.**

CHARACTERS

Name	Description	Voice Type
Floria Tosca	a renowned singer	soprano
Mario Cavaradossi	a painter Tosca's boyfriend	tenor
Baron Scarpia	chief of police	baritone
Cesare Angelotti	former consul of the Roman Republic	bass
Sacristan	person in charge of the sacristy	bass
Spoletta	police officer loyal to Scarpia	tenor
Sciarrone	police agent	bass
Jailer		bass
Shepherd		boy soprano
soldiers, townsfolk, alter boys		Chorus

SYNOPSIS

Act I

Cesare Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner, takes refuge in the church of Sant' Andrea della Valle, hiding in the Attavanti chapel. As he vanishes, the Sacristan enters, and soon after, Mario Cavaradossi arrives to continue his work on a portrait of Mary Magdalene, inspired by the Marchesa Attavanti, whom he has seen but does not know. Mario compares the Marchesa's blonde beauty with the dark beauty of his lover, the singer Floria Tosca ("Recondita armonia"). After the Sacristan leaves, Angelotti emerges, and Mario, recognizing him as a fellow patriot, offers him food and hides him again as Tosca arrives. Jealous and suspicious, Tosca questions Mario and is briefly placated, but when she recognizes the Marchesa's likeness in the painting, she becomes furious. Mario reassures her, and after she leaves, he helps Angelotti escape to his villa. The Sacristan returns with choristers preparing for a "Te Deum," but they are interrupted by the entrance of Baron Scarpia, the police chief, who is searching for Angelotti. Scarpia finds a fan with the Attavanti crest and uses it to inflame Tosca's jealousy, setting in motion his plan to capture both Angelotti and Tosca ("Va, Tosca!").

Act II

In the Farnese Palace, Scarpia relishes the thought of breaking Tosca's will. His spy, Spoletta, arrives without Angelotti but brings in Mario, who is interrogated while Tosca sings at a royal gala nearby. Tosca arrives as Mario is taken to another room to be tortured. Under the pressure of Mario's screams, Tosca reveals Angelotti's hiding place. Mario, realizing her betrayal, curses her, but their argument is cut short by news 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, now intent on possessing Tosca, offers to spare Mario's life if she yields to him. Tosca, desperate, prays for help ("Vissi d'arte"). Finally, she agrees to Scarpia's demands. He orders what he claims will be a mock execution for Mario and writes a safe conduct pass for the lovers. However, as Scarpia approaches Tosca, she kills him with a knife, taking the pass and leaving the room after placing candles around his body.

Act III

At dawn, Mario awaits execution at the Castel Sant'Angelo. Reflecting on his love for Tosca, he writes her a farewell note ("E lucevan le stelle"). Tosca arrives and joyfully tells him of Scarpia's death, showing him the safe conduct pass. She instructs Mario on how to fake his death during the mock execution. However, when the firing squad shoots, the bullets are real. Tosca realizes she has been deceived, and when Spoletta arrives to arrest her for Scarpia's murder, she leaps to her death, calling on Scarpia to meet her before God.

LANGIAPPE

- Opera Base reports 98 productions of *Tosca* worldwide for the 2024-2025 season.
- In 2022, *Tosca* ranked as the 3rd most performed opera in the world with 581 performances over 118 productions.
- The opera is adapted from Victorien Sardou's play *La Tosca*. Luigi Illica was initially commissioned to write a libretto for another composer, but Puccini, after overhearing Giuseppe Verdi discuss it, successfully secured the rights.
- Sarah Bernhardt played *Tosca* in the original play, *La Tosca*.
- Although *Tosca* portrays a famous Roman opera singer, women were banned from the stage in Rome until 1798, with castratos performing female roles.
- The Barberini chapel at Sant'Andrea della Valle contains a hidden chamber that is coincidentally linked to a statue of Mary Magdalene.
- Puccini meticulously composed the bell sounds in *Tosca*, matching the exact pitch of the bells at Saint Peter's Basilica and Castel Sant'Angelo, even having foundries recreate the bells for the opera.
- *Tosca* is the only Puccini opera that did not premiere in northern Italy or at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.
- Puccini had significant disagreements with librettist Luigi Illica. Due to Puccini's demands, the final libretto differed greatly from the original. A proposed alternate ending, where Tosca goes mad and dies of Sudden Operatic Death Syndrome, was rejected.
- The famous aria "Vissi d'Arte" from Act II was nearly removed because Puccini felt it disrupted the story's flow.

Listening Guide

Act 1 Romanza: "Recondita armonia" ("Hidden harmony")

- Maria Cavaradossi sings of his love for Floria Tosca, contrasting her beauty to the painting of Mary.
- Make a list of adjectives that describe the melody and the characters.

Act 1 Ensemble: "Va, Tosca! | Te Deum" (Go Tosca! We praise the oh God.)

- Baron Scarpia expresses his desire for Tosca while the choir of the church praises God.
- What unusual sound starts the aria? How do the instruments interact with each other and the singers? How many melodies do you hear?

Act 2 Aria: “Vissi d’arte” (I lived for art.)

- Floria Tosca sings a fervent prayer to God, asking why she is being punished after all the good she has done.
- Below is the translation of the aria. How does Puccini’s music portray these lyrics?

I lived for art, I lived for love, I never hurt a living soul!

With a furtive hand how many miseries I knew I helped

Always with sincere faith, my prayer went up to the holy tabernacles.

Always with sincere faith, I gave flowers to the altars.

In my hour of pain, why, why, Lord, why do you reward me like this?

I put jewels on the Madonna’s mantle and gave song to the stars and heaven,

who laugh more beautifully. In my hour of pain, why, why, Lord,

ah, why do you reward me like this?

Spotify Playlist for Listening Guide Examples:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5ojaa4rH06GCMrGYpv9lbY?si=e7eb9371abe84116>

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Activity #1: The Five C’s

Characters: Were they interesting? Believable? Are their actions, words, and thoughts consistent?

Conflict: What conflicts were established? How were they resolved?

Climax: How did the conflict lead to the climax of the opera?

Conclusion: What is the conclusion of the opera? Was it consistent? Satisfying? Believable?

Context: What are the historical, physical, and emotional settings? What about the sets and costumes?

Activity #2: Research!

Have the students study the historical context of the day the opera happened. What date was the Battle of Marengo?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This Study Guide was compiled from the following sources:

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The Opera 101

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