



Key Notes

TOSCA PUCCINI



Becoming Scarpia

Psychopathic, misogynistic, murdering ... or misunderstood?

Baritone **David John Pike** is making his Canadian mainstage opera debut and singing his first Scarpia with POV. Robert Holliston interviews David.

You are working overseas a lot these days – what led you to settle in Luxembourg?

Business originally brought me to Luxembourg and love has kept me there. I am a reformed Chartered Accountant, and was originally sent to Luxembourg to run a small practice. Soon after my arrival I met Josiane, a winegrower's daughter, on the banks of the Moselle, and have since "gone native". We live right on the German border overlooking the vineyards and the river, but at the same time are a couple of hours' drive away from any number of major European cities, and an hour's flight from all the capitals. My only complaint is that it's too far from Canada – although, these days, it often seems easier and cheaper to get to Canada from Europe than it is to fly across Canada!

Scarpia is generally considered a fairly dramatic role – how are you enjoying its challenges? Would you consider it totally different from, say, Marcello [in *La Bohème*], or more of an extension?

Yes, "fairly dramatic" is one way of describing it. Otherwise stated, it is a bloody big sing, and the character is downright evil, so that can also be draining. But in short (and this is in no way a reflection of inherent evilness in David!) I'm *loving* Scarpia. Of course, the role was daunting at first, but soon it came "into my voice," and what I love about it is that it sits in a comfortable range somehow, even though it's fairly high – Puccini was clever in writing in a "preserving style" for my Fach, I guess! In contrast, good old Marcello is just a swell guy, whether from Mimì's, Rudolfo's or the other guys' perspectives. I like singing a Marcello or Schaubard because of

the jovial camaraderie and later the empathetic love and care they demonstrate for both leads. In vocal terms, I like your idea of "extension" as Scarpia is vocally somehow a "bigger" Marcello, as the range is similar and of course those delicious Puccini lines are there. The other practical challenge is that Scarpia is on stage the whole of Act 2 (directly after the huge *Te Deum* scene) with little chance for a "singer moment" in the wings. Old Marcello has some big lines, but he gets to put his feet up in between!

How are you looking forward to playing this remarkably villainous character?

I'm very much looking forward to it. My aim is to offer a slightly more "elegant" (and therefore perhaps even more threatening?) Scarpia, with a bit of contrast so he isn't just constantly barking orders. Perhaps he does have a moment or two where he really does feel something for Tosca apart from the obvious ... or does he? Maybe he's simply misunderstood? In any case, the score has some moments when a real *legato* and bit of seduction can take the place of the otherwise barking, harsh, commanding, psychopathic, misogynistic murdering rapist!

Is there a particular Scarpia from the past that has inspired you?

Where to start? Of course, George London's elegant Scarpia and noble sound is inspiring, and Cornell MacNeil's enormous impression is an obvious reference. Bryn Terfel's recent interpretation in the 2011 Royal Opera

House production was simply outstanding, particularly his acting. I've also heard a superb recording of Gerald Finley's *Tre sbirri...* in English, which is superb. I've been very fortunate to work with one of the greatest Scarpias ever in Sherrill Milnes, who has generously taught me a great deal about the role and how to sing it. He's therefore my closest source of inspiration, and probably my model in many respects, both vocally and stylistically.

Among the Puccini and Verdi roles, are there any that you'd especially like to add to your repertoire in the next few years?

Somehow I've missed Sharpless thus far, which would be a great sing – he's a swell guy too, although he too doesn't get an aria – it's a hard life for Puccini baritones! On the Verdi front, there is a huge range of possibilities, but to name a few: I would expect to do a Germont (*La traviata*) fairly soon, an Amonasro (*Aida*) would be good, Ford (*Falstaff*) is optimal, and of course Rodrigo in *Don Carlos* is another wonderful character, but there are plenty more....

Visit

www.pov.bc.ca/tosca.html to read more about David's work with Sherrill Milnes and to hear selections from *Whither must I wander?* – David's debut solo CD on Signum Classics, which features works by Vaughan Williams, Finzi and Quilter. It has attracted rave reviews and is featured on British Airways' in-flight entertainment. David's website is at www.davidjohnpike.com.



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Background of *Tosca*

Shortly after finishing *Edgar* (1889), Puccini saw the celebrated actress Sarah Bernhardt in Milan, playing the title role in Victorien Sardou's play *La Tosca*. Although he understood no French, the composer sensed that here was a powerful drama that might translate very effectively into the operatic medium.

Shortly after, Puccini heard that Verdi himself had flirted with the idea of setting Sardou's play, but decided that he was too old to take on the project. This fired Puccini's enthusiasm for the subject, but he hesitated to begin work and the idea was forgotten until after the launching of *La Bohème* in 1896.

News reached Puccini that another composer, Alberto Franchetti, was already work on a setting of *Tosca* with a libretto by Luigi Illica. This nudge from a rival was all Puccini needed, and somehow Illica and publisher Giulio Ricordi convinced Franchetti that Sardou's play was too "political," and therefore risky, a proposition. The hapless composer abandoned work on the project with the relief of someone who'd just had a "close call," and Puccini signed a contract with Ricordi for a three-act opera called *Tosca*.

The première of *Tosca* took place at the Teatro Costanzi, Rome, on January 14, 1900. The drama offstage very nearly rivaled that onstage. The political scene in Rome was as volatile as at the time that *Tosca* was set – exactly 100 years earlier.

Italy had been united, but King Umberto I had been the target of several failed assassination attempts (he was successfully assassinated on July 29, 1900). Anonymous bomb threats were sent to the theatre, exacerbating a situation already volatile due to rumors that the opera was politically subversive. Police

searched ticket-holders outside the theatre, creating long delays; those refused entrance protested noisily, causing the conductor to stop the music and ring the curtain down. When the audience had been calmed down (in part by the playing of the national anthem) the curtain rose again on the beginning of the opera.

There was a great ovation after Act I, and the opera's two most famous arias as well as the Act III duet were encored. But critical response was mixed: the composer's skill as an orchestrator was praised, but the violence and sadism of the plot was considered extreme, and while the opera didn't take long to establish itself in the permanent repertory, neither did the tendency of critics and academics to look down their noses at it.

While La Bohème is all poetry and no plot, wrote Giacosa to Ricordi, Tosca is all plot and no poetry. Nevertheless, with the early reviews of *Tosca* we see for the first time references to a distinctive "Puccini style," and if this style has sometimes caused the more rarified critics to reach for the smelling salts, audiences throughout the world have embraced it warmly and thoroughly.

Historical Background

In 1800, Italy was still divided into a number of smaller states, most of which were occupied by the Habsburg or Austro-Hungarian Empire. The French Revolution had provided renewed inspiration for the Italian freedom fighters.

In 1798 the French conquered the church-state of Rome and created a republic, but were shortly forced into retreat by the army of Naples, and Rome was returned to the Pope. In May 1800 the French army crossed the Alps to do battle with the Austrian forces on a plain outside the village of Marengo. Napoleon won the Battle of Marengo and reconquered the northern parts of Italy – an event included in the second act of the opera where Cavaradossi breaks into jubilant song as he's notified of it, prompting Scarpia to condemn him to death.

Intellectuals and artists saw Napoleon as liberating the country from the terror of the dictatorships and as aiding the cause of a united Italy, whereas those loyal to the Pope and King, such as Scarpia, tried to keep the Austro-Hungarian dominance and protect the Kingdom of Naples by all means.

Between these two extremes we find *Tosca*, a singer loyal to the King who has fallen in love with the freedom fighter Cavaradossi.

Synopsis

The events take place in Rome on a single day in the year 1800

Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner, slips into the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle where his friend, the artist Cavaradossi, is working on a portrait of Mary Magdalene, whose face is that of a blue-eyed, golden-haired woman – nothing like Cavaradossi's dark-haired, jealous lover, the singer Tosca.

Angelotti hides as *Tosca* arrives. When she accuses her lover of entertaining a woman, Cavaradossi assuages her fears and agrees to meet her later. As soon as she has gone, Cavaradossi offers his villa to Angelotti as a hideout and the two men flee together.

Scarpia, the Chief of Police, arrives and discovers clues that connect Cavaradossi to Angelotti and the woman in the painting, who is Angelotti's sister. *Tosca* returns to the church and finds Scarpia, who suggests that Cavaradossi is in love with Angelotti's sister. *Tosca* leaves in a jealous rage, and Scarpia orders his agents to follow her.

Cavaradossi is arrested and brought to Scarpia's apartment to be interrogated under torture. When *Tosca* arrives, Scarpia questions her as Cavaradossi's cries of agony are heard in the next room. *Tosca* reveals Angelotti's hiding place in order to free her lover. Cavaradossi defies Scarpia, who orders his execution.

As news arrives of Angelotti's discovery and suicide, Scarpia promises to spare Cavaradossi if *Tosca* will submit to his advances. She agrees, although Scarpia insists that they must go through with a mock execution. As Scarpia advances amorously toward *Tosca*, she stabs him with a knife she has found and rushes out.

At the Castel Sant' Angelo, Cavaradossi awaits execution. *Tosca* arrives to tell him that when he is "shot" he must feign death. The execution takes place and Cavaradossi falls to the ground. After the firing squad marches off, *Tosca* is horrified to discover that her lover is actually dead.

Shouting is heard from inside the castle: Scarpia's body has been discovered. Trapped, *Tosca* leaps from the battlements to her death.

Robert Holliston

Discovering *Tosca* and Puccini: Resources at the University of Victoria Library

If you would like to view the score of *Tosca*, hear a recording or read more about the opera or its composer, the University of Victoria Library has the resources you need. The library's extensive score collection has both the full score and the vocal score, along with recordings of *Tosca*, including performances with Leontyne Price, Maria Callas, and Kiri Te Kanawa. The library also has a copy of the libretto to *Tosca* and a book about the opera itself.

Selected books about Puccini and his music include:

Letters of Giacomo Puccini / translated and edited by Ena Makin (ML410 P89A23)

Giacomo Puccini: the Man, His Life, His Work / Richard Specht (ML410 P89S61)

Giacomo Puccini / Wolfgang Marggraf (ML410 P89M26 1979)

Puccini: a Biography / Mary Jane Phillips-Matz (ML410 P89P52)

The Puccini Companion / edited by William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini. (ML410 P89P833)

For a concise article on Puccini, check the *Grove Dictionary of Music* in the Music Reference Area. For more information on any of these resources or on anything music related please come by the library or ask the music librarian, Bill Blair at blairw@uvic.ca or 250-472-5025.

Bill Blair, Music Librarian, University of Victoria Libraries

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www.pov.bc.ca/tosca.html

What a pleasure to welcome back **Joni Henson**, who wowed us with her Senta in 2011's *The Flying Dutchman*, and now performs her first **Tosca**. Joni recently sang Desdemona in *Otello* with Calgary Opera, and has performed the Foreign Princess (*Rusalka*), Elisabetta (*Don Carlos*), Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*) and Guttrune (*Götterdämmerung*) with the Canadian Opera Company, and Santuzza (*Cavalleria Rusticana*) and Leonora (*Il trovatore*) with Opera Hamilton. Joni will be back at POV next fall for a comic turn as Alice Ford in *Falstaff*.



Joni Henson as Senta in *The Flying Dutchman*.
Emily Cooper Photography

Our favourite fireman-turned-opera singer, **Luc Robert** returns for the role of **Cavaradossi** in his fourth POV appearance, following successes as the Duke in *Rigoletto*, Nicias in *Thais*, and Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. Luc performs a great deal in Europe, having recently sung Nicias with Finnish National Opera; Faust with Estonian National Opera; Rodolfo in *Luisa Miller* with Malmö Opera, Sweden; Orphée in Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice*, and the title role in *La Damnation de Faust* with l'Opéra de Rennes. Upcoming is his first Don Carlo, in Dortmund, Germany.



Luc Robert as the Duke in *Rigoletto*.
David Cooper Photography

Christina Poddubiuk is the award-winning **set and costume designer** who created the beautiful design for *Capriccio* in 2010. We are looking forward to savouring the way she captures the flavour of Rome and the theatricality, danger, and passion of this most gripping of operas. Christina has over 25 years experience as a set and costume designer, mostly in classical theatre for companies such as the Shaw and Stratford Festivals, Soulepper, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival.



An Interview with Director Amiel Gladstone

Amiel Gladstone is a director and playwright whose work has been produced throughout Canada, the U.S. and Europe. A founding member of Victoria's Theatre SKAM, Amiel has directed for many leading Canadian companies, including the Belfry, Touchstone, Caravan Farm Theatres, the National Arts Centre, and Vancouver Opera, for whom he directed *Lucia di Lammermoor*. We are delighted that he is making his POV debut with our production of *Tosca*. Robert Holliston interviews Amiel...



You've had an extremely varied career in theater as a creator, director and performer - have you always been drawn to music as well?

Yes. Some of my closest friends are musicians. Many of the plays that I've directed have included live music in them. I feel it's an intrinsic part of the live experience. Like many people I feel a bit jealous of musicians too – their ability to jam with each other. I love the clear open emotion of it.

What led you to the wacky world of opera? Were you taken to see operas as a child or youth?

A few years back Vancouver Opera asked me if I wanted some training as a Stage Director. They felt that my theatre directing could be applicable to opera. I spent a few years training there, assistant directing a couple of shows, directing the touring productions for children, and taking master classes. Subsequently I directed *Lucia di Lammermoor* there. My grandfather was an opera singer and he and my grandmother taught singing for years in Toronto, so it is in my blood a little. But my watching experience has been much more in the musical theatre world.

Music theatre must present certain challenges to a director simply because some of the material is sung rather than spoken – these challenges are heightened in opera because of foreign languages and strictly instrumental passages. How have you enjoyed dealing with them?

You've managed to ask me about the hardest part – the foreign language. The language of music is much more emotive and

intuitive. Working on something that's entirely in Italian, it can be hard to wrap my brain around it. But the challenges are what make me embrace it – I like how it twists my brain around and keeps me on my toes.

Is this your first go at *Tosca*? What is there about the story and characters that excites you? (Other than the fact that all three principals die before the last curtain...)

My first *Tosca*. I love the intrigue at play. The power dynamic. How the love between Tosca and Cavaradossi is complicated. I like that Scarpia is appealing and repellent at the same time. I like that it can feel like an intimate drama among three main players and a huge story all at the same time. I guess it's the contradictions that I like.

I really enjoyed visiting your website and reading your views about operatic – and Shakespearean – productions today. Can you divulge anything about your plans for *Tosca*, or do we have to wait until opening night?

Christina and I have talked a lot about the heart of the drama and focused on the characters as much as possible. We've looked at many different versions of Rome and the actual spaces and come up with a highly theatricalized version that is beautiful and ugly. I want to create a production that appeals to purists, but with enough surprises to keep us wondering what's coming next. Again – reveling in the contradictions.

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Events Calendar

TOSCA The Royal Theatre

April 4, 6, 10, 12, at 8 pm
Matinée: April 14, 2:30 pm
Pre-performance lobby lecture an hour before curtain
In Italian with English surtitles

COMMUNITY EVENTS

INSIDE OPERA with Robert Holliston Sunday, March 24

Two Sessions: 10 am and noon
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall, University of Victoria.
Robert Holliston and guests present a guided tour of *Tosca*. Bring your friends. It's all free, including the parking.
Please reserve before noon March 22, specifying which session you plan to attend. Space is limited.
250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca

Sense of Occasion

Thursday, April 4, 6:30 pm East Lobby, Royal Theatre.
Pre-performance reception to celebrate the opening night of *Tosca*. Gourmet finger foods and wine. Space is limited. Dress is festive. \$25 per person.
Reserve with payment: 250-382-1641.

DONOR RECOGNITION EVENT

President's Circle Working Rehearsal Saturday, March 30, Royal Theatre

1 pm Coffee and cookies
1:20 pm Discussion with Conductor Giuseppe Pietraroia
2 pm Sitzprobe begins
For President's Circle members and Impresario Circle members. Invitations have been sent by mail.
RSVP by March 27 to 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca.

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