

Puccini Listener's Guide

Giacomo Puccini and His Great *Tosca*
2013-2014 Classical Connections Series
Concert Two: Friday, November 15, 2013
Program: *Chrysanthemums* | *Tosca* (excerpts)



And now for something completely different!

At last season's first Classical Connections post-concert discussion, I turned the tables on you. For once, I asked a question: "Now that the Philharmonic has joined with Dayton Ballet and Dayton Opera in the Dayton Performing Arts Alliance, what would you think of a CC program that addressed the music of an upcoming Ballet or Opera performance?"

My question was greeted with loud and enthusiastic applause.

DAYTON
Philharmonic



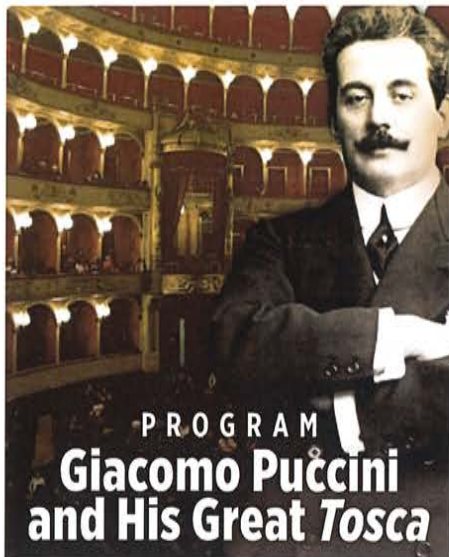
NEAL GITTLEMAN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR
DAYTON PHILHARMONIC

And here we are! We'll spend an evening in the hot-blooded world of *Tosca*, one of the best-loved operas of all time. Unlike most Classical Connections concerts, tonight's won't end with a full performance of the work in question. If we discussed and demonstrated and then did a complete performance, we'd get out at about two in the morning!

But after we explore the ins and outs of this incredible opera tonight (including a nearly complete concert performance of Act III), you'll have two chances to experience Puccini's *Tosca* in all its glory. Not just the music. Acting. Scenery. Stagecraft. Props. Wigs. The whole nine yards! Take advantage of our ticket special and get a seat for Friday evening, November 22 or Sunday afternoon, November 24 to complete what we start tonight at Classical Connections.

I hope you enjoy your behind-the-scenes look at the music of *Tosca* tonight, and then join Dayton Opera, Dayton Philharmonic, and guest conductor Joseph Mechavich for the whole enchilada next week!

You won't be sorry!



PROGRAM
**Giacomo Puccini
 and His Great *Tosca***

DEMIRJIAN
 CLASSICAL CONNECTIONS

Friday, November 15, 2013, 8:00 p.m.,
 Schuster Center
 Q&A after the concert

Neal Gittleman *conductor, presenter*
 GIACOMO PUCCINI (1858–1924)

Chrysanthemums

Tosca

Act I: Discussion,
 Demonstrations & Excerpts

Act II: Discussion,
 Demonstrations & Excerpts

Act III: Discussion & Excerpts

Kara Shay Thompson: Floria Tosca
 Jonathan Burton: Mario Cavaradossi
 Mark Schnaible: Baron Vitellio Scarpia
 Thomas Hammons: Sacristan
 Suzie Herman: Shepherd
 The Dayton Opera Chorus
 Jeffrey Powell, Chorus Master

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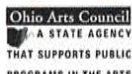
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Classical Connections Listener's Guide
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The Case for Opera

BY NEAL GITTLEMAN

Opera is staged drama in which the characters sing.

“They what?”

They sing.

“But why are they singing?”

They’re singing because it’s opera.

“But people don’t sing in real life!”

It’s not real life. It’s art. Get over it!

Agent 007 couldn’t really eject people from his Aston Martin. Roy Lichtenstein canvases are bigger than real comic strips. Da Vinci did not paint Mary Magdalene into *The Last Supper*. Jay-Z shouldn’t rhyme “Pampers” with “Hamptons”.

People sing in opera.

Once you get used to that one little detail, opera is a pretty exciting deal.

If you’re new to opera (either new and curious or new and skeptical), I hope this essay will give you a little encouragement and help you have a thrilling experience with Puccini’s *Tosca* at Classical Connections and at Dayton Opera. If you’re already an opera fan, I hope this essay will give you some good points to cite when you ask your opera-shy friends to join you at the Schuster Center or at your local movie-plex.



ELMER & BUGS: KILL DA WABBIT

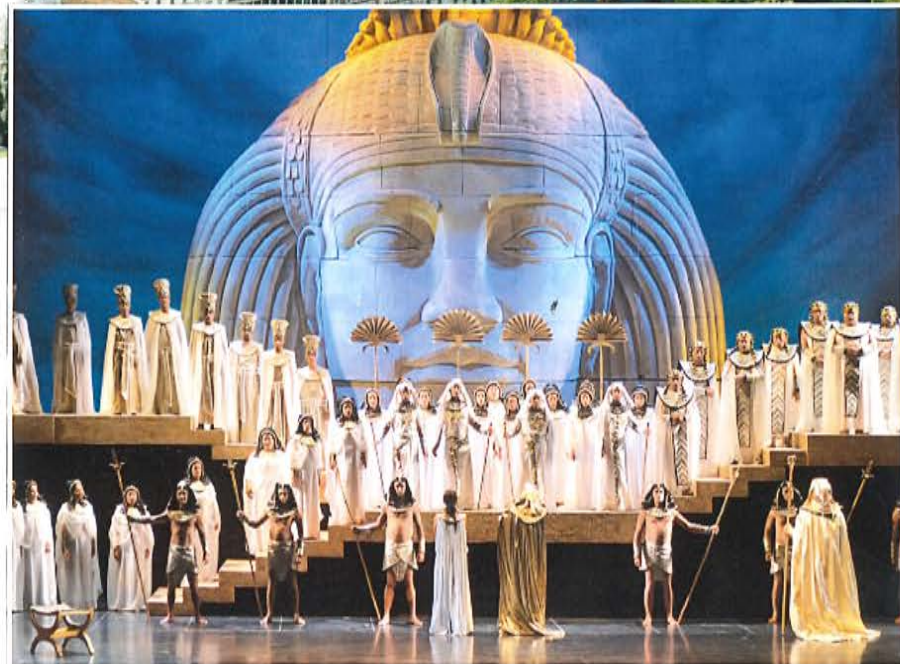
Here are my six best arguments in favor of opera.

1. Emotion. That’s why they sing. Singing carries more emotional weight than spoken words. Take this line, said by a man with only an hour to live: “Never was I so much in love with life!” Pretty moving. Say it in Italian (*E non ho amato mai tanto vita!*), and it’s even better. But when Jonathan Burton sings those lines as Mario Cavaradossi in Act III of *Tosca*, it’s more than just dramatic. It breaks your heart. The singing adds an extra dimension. The orchestra adds another. And the big hold on the high note? That’s the climax of the whole opera.

2. Spectacle. From its earliest origins at the turn of the 17th century, opera has regaled audiences with spectacle. Mythic gods descend from the heavens. Heroes go off on quests. Ill-fated lovers die in each other’s arms. Elephants, horses, and a cast of thousands march across the stage. Not every opera is spectacle-based (*Tosca* is a good counterexample), but before Hollywood invented



BRUNNHILDE EN CASQUE



AIDA

computer-generated special effects, opera was the most eye-popping stuff around. When staged well, big operatic set pieces like the Anvil Chorus from Verdi's *Il Trovatore* or the fall of the temple in Saint-Saëns' *Samson and Delilah* still, well, bring the house down.

3. Intimacy. Sounds crazy, no? But because opera can be so big, it can also pull you in for incredible moments where it's just you and the singers, hearts beating as one. Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* gazing into each other's eyes as they realize they just drank a love potion instead of poison. Philip Glass' *Gandhi* comforting his beaten-up followers at the end of *Satyagraha*. Verdi's *Aida* and Radames pledging undying love as they suffocate in a pyramid's crypt. These are some of grand opera's most unforgettable—and most intimate—moments.

4. Silliness. Opera's not always life and death. Sure, *Melisande* dies a heartrending death at the end of Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande*. But there's "Three Little Maids from School" from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*. Or the zany Act II finale of Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. Or the Marx Brothers-style chaos of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. Because opera does take itself so seriously, when composers go for the cheap laugh it's truly hilarious.

5. Virtuosity. Back to the singing again. There's something viscerally exciting about it. A big operatic voice sailing out over a giant orchestra without amplification. The Queen of the Night in Mozart's *Magic Flute* zooming up toward notes that only dogs can hear. The held-forever high note at the end of "Nessun dorma" from Puccini's *Turandot*. The glittering pyrotechnics of any number of arias in Handel's *Julius*

Caesar. That's what drives opera lovers into their bravo-shouting, bouquet-tossing paroxysms of excitement.

6. Danger. Yes, opera has a dark side. Fans go nuts when things go well. But sometimes—especially in Italy—opera becomes a blood sport, with rabid fans waiting to shower boos and catcalls on a missed note or a wacky staging. Dayton audiences are too nice for that, but if you watch an opera-at-the-movies show from La Scala, all bets are off!

The bottom line: Forget the stereotypes! Give opera a chance, and it can be a thrilling experience. So check it out! This season's Dayton Opera productions—Puccini's *Tosca*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, and Verdi's *Aida* are a great introduction for the novice and a rich dramatic feast for the connoisseur.

Reality Opera

Tosca is a great example of the opera style known as verismo. The verismo movement in Italian literature and opera began in the 1870s, spread to France, and culminated in Puccini's masterworks for the lyric stage.

Verismo operas focused on real-life subjects, depicting the dramas facing—and created by—everyday people. Gritty stories. Adultery. Violence. Murder. Scandalous, sensational stuff.

Very popular with audiences!

The best-loved verismo operas include Ruggero Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* (1892), Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890), Jules Massenet's *La Navarraise* (1894), and Leoš Janáček's *Jenůfa* (1904).

Giacomo Puccini was the undisputed master of verismo and transcended mere sensationalism. His operas showed real people, living in a real world, facing real problems. *Tosca* is a perfect example.



SANT' ANDREA DELLA VALLE CHURCH



FARNESE PALACE



CASTEL SANT' ANGELO

Tosca is set in real places: Rome's Sant' Andrea della Valle Church, Farnese Palace, and Castel Sant' Angelo. In a real time: between noon on June 17, 1800 and dawn of the following day. We know the exact day because the story features an important historical event—the arrival in Rome of news from the Battle of Marengo. The battle, between Napoleon and the Austrian Army, took place on June 14. Reports reached Rome three days later. They're in the opera. The first, erroneous, report (of Napoleon's defeat) comes midway through Act I. The correction comes at a key moment in Act II and sets in motion the tragic events of Act III.

Early 19th-century Italian politics is way too complicated to explain here, but the opera's good guys (freedom fighter Cesare Angelotti, painter Mario Cavaradossi, and opera singer Floria Tosca) are all—to some extent—Bonaparte sympathizers. The bad guys (Roman police chief Baron Vitellio Scarpia and his henchmen) serve the Kingdom of Naples, allied with Austria.

Take away the politics, and all you have is a nice painter in love with a jealous soprano. But Cavaradossi and Tosca get pulled into the political intrigue, and the wheels of power grind them up.

Real people with real problems.

Who sing about them.

Verismo.

Or as Dean Martin might say:

"When there's gore and there's grit

In an opera house skit,

That's verismo!"

A Puccini Timeline



1858
December 22, born in Lucca, Tuscany to composer Michele Puccini and Albina Magi, daughter of a musical family.

1863
Michele Puccini dies. Giacomo goes to live and study with his uncle, church organist Fortunato Magi.

1872
Takes over Lucca church organist job from Uncle Fortunato.

1876
Walks 30 miles to Pisa to see Verdi's *Aida*. Catches the "opera bug".

1880
Studies at the Milan Conservatory under composition teachers Bazzini and Ponchielli.

1883
Enters his first opera, *Le Villi*, in a one-act opera competition. Doesn't win, but the opera's good enough to be produced anyway.

1889
Reads Victorien Sardou's play *Tosca*. Begins negotiations to secure the operatic rights.

1895
Finishes *La Bohème*. Sees Sarah Bernhardt perform the role of Tosca in Florence.

1898
Begins composing *Tosca*, completed in 1899.

1900
Tosca premiere.

1923
Diagnosed with throat cancer.

1924
November 29, dies in Brussels of a heart attack while undergoing experimental cancer treatment.

1858
Minnesota statehood. Lincoln: "A house divided against itself cannot stand." First successful ascent of the Eiger. Macy's.

1863
Emancipation Proclamation. Battle of Gettysburg. Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*.

1872
Jules Verne: *Around the World in 80 Days*. Whistler: *The Artist's Mother*.

1876
Disputed Tilden-Hayes presidential election. First complete performance of Wagner's Ring Cycle.

1880
Garfield elected 20th U.S. President. Lew Wallace: *Ben Hur*. Rodin: *The Thinker*. Bingo.

1883
Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Nietzsche: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Death of Wagner. *Ladies' Home Journal*. Brooklyn Bridge opens.

1889
Benjamin Harrison elected 23rd U.S. President. Eastman sells first Kodak camera.

1895
H.G. Wells: *The Time Machine*. Gillette invents the safety razor. Tchaikovsky: *Swan Lake*.

1898
"Remember the Maine!" Paris Metro opens.

1900
First Davis Cup. Chekov: *Uncle Vanya*.

1923
Teapot Dome scandal hearings. "Tea for Two".

1924
J. Edgar Hoover takes over the FBI. D.W. Griffith: *The Ten Commandments*.