

CALGARY OPERA

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INSIDER'S GUIDE

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Iyârhe Nakoda Nations, the Otipemisiwak Métis Government of the Métis Nation within Alberta Districts 5 & 6, and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

KEY IDEAS

- **Tosca is a political thriller that unfolds during the afternoon of June 17 through the early morning of June 18, 1800 in Rome during the Napoleonic wars.**
- **Each of the opera's three acts takes place in particular locations in Rome, and the opera refers to actual historical events surrounding the Battle of Marengo.** As such, opera directors, including for this production, often choose not to change the opera's setting, as they can more easily with other operas.
- **The protagonist of this opera is Floria Tosca, a renowned opera singer:** it is one of the rare opportunities when a soprano gets to play the role of a soprano! Many vocalists associate with this character deeply, having lived a life of sacrifice for one's art, like Tosca sings in her haunting lament, "Vissi d'arte" ("I lived for art").
- **Music historians have considered whether Tosca is a victim or heroine, some speculating that her tragic flaw is her naivety—in a dangerous environment, she trusts too easily.** Stage director Joshua Borths leans into this interpretation: "Despite her strength, intelligence, and passion, Tosca did not know the rules of the game she was playing," Borths says. **"In fact, she didn't even know she was playing one. This is the dark heart of Tosca."**
- **Given the high stakes of the opera, the composer, Giacomo Puccini, weaves dramatic tension into the music,** such as this sharply descending musical motive, which some critics consider to be the theme for Angelotti, the political fugitive. This motive is furtive and fleeting and accelerates the pacing of the opera.
- **This style of Italian opera, popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, became known as *Verismo*, meaning "realism,"** from the Italian word "vero" ("true"). Since its roots in the 1600s, opera evolved from presenting stories about gods and legendary heroes, to portraying the lives and struggles of ordinary people. **Verismo focused on the gritty underbelly of human action—obsession, corruption, and violence.** Musically, Puccini places these behaviours front and center: the opera opens with the theme of Scarpia.
- **Tosca carries many deeply moving musical moments,** including Cavaradossi's prayer "E lucevan le stelle" ("And the stars were shining") and the powerful Te Deum, which juxtaposes Scarpia's lustful madness with the chorus's thundering calls of adulation to God.

CHARACTERS

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	ABOUT
Floria Tosca A famous opera singer	FLOH-ree-ah TOSS-kah	soprano	A devoted and temperamental performing artist in love with the painter Cavaradossi
Mario Cavaradossi A painter	MAH-ree-oh kah-vah-rah-DOSS-see	tenor	A free-thinking supporter of the political opposition, Cavaradossi swears to help his friend Angelotti against all odds
Baron Scarpia Chief of police	SCAR-pee-ah	baritone	Rome's ruthless and corrupt Chief of Police desires Tosca and manipulates others to pursue what he wants
Cesare Angelotti A political fugitive	CHEH-zah-reh ahn-jeh-LOT-tee	bass	A former consul of Napoleon's fallen Roman Republic who has escaped from the Castel Sant'Angelo prison in Rome
Spoletta Scarpia's agent	spoh-LET-tah	tenor	Scarpia's right-hand man and assistant to his crimes
Sacristan Church caretaker	SAK-ri-stuhn	bass	The Sacristan is part of the clergy and takes care of the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle in Rome

Calgary Opera attracts world class talent to perform for our audience, including local singers and McPhee Artists who apprentice at Calgary Opera. For more information about the performers who bring these characters to life, please visit us [here](#).

THE STORY

Act I

Rome, June 17, 1800. The Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle.

Under the background of the Napoleonic wars, Rome is gripped by political unrest. Cesare Angelotti, a former consul of the fallen Roman Republic, has escaped from the notorious Castel Sant'Angelo prison and seeks refuge in a nearby church. His sister is a patroness there and has left him a key to the chapel and a disguise to escape unseen. There, the liberal-leaning painter Mario Cavaradossi is at work on a portrait of Mary Magdalene.

When Angelotti appears, Cavaradossi promises to help him escape. Their plans are interrupted by the arrival of Cavaradossi's lover, the celebrated singer Floria Tosca. Passionate and temperamental, Tosca quickly becomes suspicious after hearing voices behind locked doors. Her jealousy deepens when she notices that the woman in Cavaradossi's painting bears little resemblance to her. Though Cavaradossi reassures Tosca of his love, doubt lingers as she departs. Once alone again, Cavaradossi and Angelotti prepare their escape.

Cavaradossi offers a hiding place at his villa outside the city. Their plans are soon threatened by the arrival of Baron Scarpia, Rome's corrupt chief of police who desires Tosca for himself. Noticing the painter's belongings in the previously locked chapel, Scarpia suspects Cavaradossi has aided Angelotti's escape. Discovering a fan belonging to Angelotti's sister, Scarpia manipulates Tosca's jealousy, implying that Cavaradossi has been unfaithful.

Taken in by Scarpia's ruse, Tosca rushes off to confront her lover while Scarpia orders his men to follow her. As celebrations erupt across Rome following false reports of Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Marengo, Scarpia revels in the chaos he has unleashed. Determined to possess Tosca and destroy Cavaradossi, he sets his plans into motion.

25-MINUTE INTERMISSION

Act II

Later that evening, the Palazzo Farnese, the home of Baron Scarpia.

Scarpia waits in his chambers while a lavish celebration unfolds elsewhere in the palace. Spoletta, his loyal agent, arrives with troubling news: Angelotti has escaped capture, but Cavaradossi has been arrested. Tosca is summoned to Scarpia's apartments just as Cavaradossi is dragged away for interrogation. As his cries echo from the torture chamber, Tosca becomes increasingly desperate. Scarpia offers her a terrible bargain: reveal Angelotti's hiding place and spare Cavaradossi further suffering. Unable to endure his torture, Tosca finally gives in and reveals Angelotti's location.

When Cavaradossi is brought back, bloodied but defiant, he is devastated by Tosca's betrayal. In the midst of the confrontation, news suddenly arrives that Napoleon has in fact won a major victory at Marengo. Overjoyed, Cavaradossi openly celebrates the triumph of the revolution before being sentenced to death.

Left alone with Tosca, Scarpia reveals his true intentions. He promises to spare Cavaradossi—but only if Tosca submits to him. Horrified and trapped, Tosca resists as long as she can. Finally, with no other way to save the man she loves, she agrees to Scarpia's terms in exchange for safe passage out of Rome and a staged execution for Cavaradossi.

Act III

The following morning, the Castel Sant'Angelo, a prison in Rome.

Awaiting execution, Cavaradossi prepares to say goodbye to life and to Tosca. But Tosca arrives with astonishing news: she has secured papers for their escape, and Scarpia has arranged a mock execution.

Once the soldiers fire their rifles, Cavaradossi must simply pretend to die. Afterward, the lovers will flee Rome together. Hopeful for the first time, the two dream of the future that awaits them beyond the city walls. The firing squad assembles, and shots ring out, but what follows is beyond what Tosca could have ever anticipated.

TOSCA: TIME AND PLACE

Tosca is set in a specific time and place: 18 hours between the afternoon of June 17 through the early morning of June 18, 1800 in Rome during the Napoleonic wars. **The story closely follows an unbelievable turnaround in military history of that era: the Battle of Marengo.**

For centuries, Rome had been the seat of the Papal States, ruled by the Pope. **In the late 1700s, following the French Revolution, the French military leader Napoleon Bonaparte began a campaign to liberate city-states across neighbouring Italy and established French satellite republics.** For the Austrian monarchists who occupied the nearby Kingdom of Naples and wished to prevent French republicanism from spreading further, it was a disaster. For Italians who supported democratic self-government, Napoleon was welcomed as a hero.

After establishing several French republics in Italy, Napoleon set his sights on Egypt. With the young general occupied abroad, Maria Carolina, the Austrian-born Queen of Naples and Sicily, took the opportunity to march her army first on Naples, her home city, then toward Rome.

In September 1799, the Roman Republic fell to Maria Carolina and **thousands of supporters of the fallen republic were imprisoned or killed in the prison of Castel Sant'Angelo.** When Napoleon returned to Paris from Egypt, he consolidated his political power, and in May 1800, **he planned to battle the Austrian army near Genoa, at Marengo.**



Detail view of *The Battle of Marengo* painted by Louis-François, Baron Lejeune

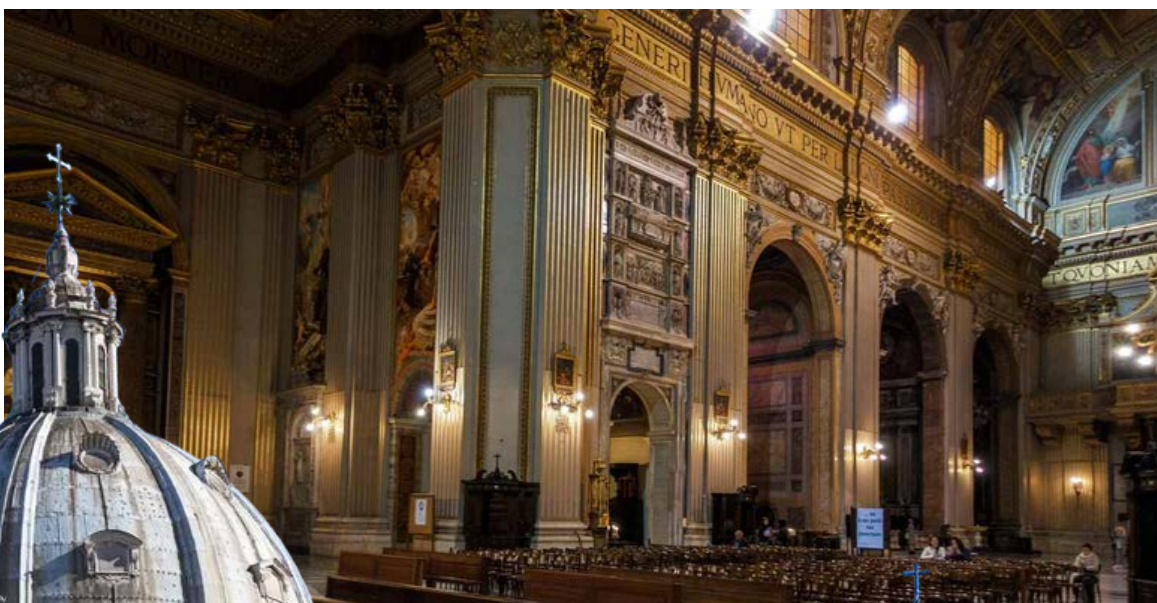
On June 14, the Austrians attacked the French, taking Napoleon by surprise. Initially, it appeared as if the Austrians, led by General Michael von Melas, would win the battle, and an initial report was sent to convey news of the Austrian victory.

However, after regrouping with fresh troops, Napoleon launched a surprise attack on the exhausted Austrians. **Ultimately, it was Napoleon's army who won the battle of Marengo, leading to a broader French victory throughout the region and the reinstatement of French rule in northern Italy.** It also solidified Napoleon's popularity as the First Consul of France, the country's most important political position at the time.



Detail of *The Battle of Marengo* painted by Louis-François, Baron Lejeune

In the opera, Scarpia serves as Rome's Chief of Police, a ruthless leader installed by the Austrian monarchy to keep security during a time of political unrest. **Scarpia would have been very pro-Austria and anti-Napoleon.** Cavaradossi, by contrast, was an idealist who supported Napoleon and the other revolutionaries wanting to break free from Austrian rule and establish a democracy in a unified Italy.



Images of the Sant'Andrea della Valle church in Rome



Act I of Puccini's *Tosca* takes place at the Sant'Andrea della Valle church in Rome. The interior of the church is well suited as a setting for the dramatic atmosphere of Puccini's opera *Tosca*. While the church boasts several side chapels, **the Attavanti Chapel mentioned in the opera was based on the existing Barberini Chapel.** The dome of the church can be seen from every corner of Rome.





Exterior of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome



Interior of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome

Act II of *Tosca* takes places at the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, which serves as Baron Scarpia's residence.

Originally, the building was built for the Farnese family, one of the most powerful clans of Renaissance Italy, even boasting a pope in the family. **After the building's main architect, Antonio da Sangallo, died, it was continued by Michelangelo.** It is one of the grandest palaces in Rome.

Since 1935, the Palazzo Farnese has served as the site for the French embassy in Rome.



Exterior and interior views of Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome

Act III of *Tosca* takes place at the Castel Sant'Angelo, located in the heart of Rome on the right bank of the Tiber River. Emperor Hadrian built the fortress as a mausoleum for himself, but by the Middle Ages, it was used by popes as a safe haven when Rome was under siege: the building is directly connected to the Vatican through the Passetto del Borgo.



Historically, the cellar of the Castel Sant'Angelo was used as a prison. When Napoleon's troops first took Rome in 1798, the Castel Sant'Angelo was overrun for the first time in its history. When the Royalists retook the city the following year, it held many supporters of the Napoleonic republic, including *Tosca*'s fictional characters of Cesare Angelotti and later Mario Cavaradossi.

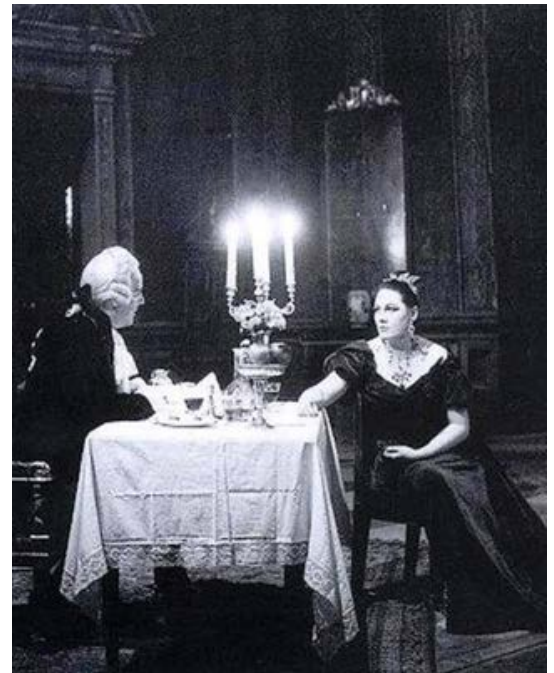
The fortress's name, which means "Castle of the Holy Angel," comes from the statue of the Archangel Michael on its roof. This statue appears in the promotional materials for Calgary Opera's *Tosca* (see p. 1).

TOSCA & VERISMO

Toward the end of the Romantic era, a new style of dramatic language appeared among opera composers: verismo, meaning "realism" from the Italian word "vero," meaning "true." **Since its roots in the 1600s, opera evolved from presenting stories about gods and legendary heroes, to portraying the lives and struggles of ordinary people.** Along this trajectory were important turning points including Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*: in 1786, the story of a cunning servant outwitting his master was so suggestive that the original French playwright was forced by court censors to set the story in neighbouring Spain so as not to give the French public any radical ideas.

By 1875, nearly a century—and several revolutions—later, Bizet's *Carmen* would go so far as to portray a murder on stage, paving the way for verismo, which most historians agree emerged with Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* in 1890. **Verismo focused on the gritty underbelly of human action—obsession, corruption, and violence—in a new musical context that shed many formal operatic conventions of the preceding centuries.** Arias were shorter, recitatives (patter-like sung dialogue) were replaced by impassioned, soaring phrases conveying ardent emotion, and the overlapping of lived experiences was conveyed by regular offstage singing and naturalistic effects like church bells ringing. Verismo allowed tragic stories to be told in as realistic a way as opera might allow.

Tosca has strong links to the musical style of verismo. **Musically, composer Giacomo Puccini places destructive human behaviour and its consequences front and center:** the opera begins not with Tosca's musical theme, but with that of Baron Scarpia, Rome's sadistic chief of police. The first three thundering chords that open the opera reappear as Scarpia enters the church, and in the tremendous Act I finale, which juxtaposes Scarpia's lustful madness with the chorus's calls of adulation to God. Scarpia's music also appears in other guises, similar to film composers who use a particular idea to musically connect one character's actions to another's, suggesting his influence seeps beyond even his physical presence.



Renata Tebaldi and Tito Gobbi in *Tosca*

Verismo was also a response to the ideals of Romanticism and captured a growing interest in the very real world around the listener. The character development of Tosca mirrors this trajectory: in her confrontation with Scarpia in Act II, she finally sees through Scarpia's facade of civility—and beyond her own innocent personal concerns—and realizes to her horror that her beloved is being tortured in a political interrogation room nearby.

Tosca also elevates these specific, gritty moments toward the universal in ways that are distinct from the verismo tradition. For instance, the principal characters are not from the working class, like other verismo operas. While Cavaradossi is a painter, he is at the same time from a noble Roman family and part of the aristocracy. Scarpia serves as chief of police and is the most trusted collaborator of the Neapolitan queen, while Tosca herself is elevated through her fame as an internationally renowned opera singer. The opera is also not confined to the interpersonal tension between individuals, but is set against a backdrop of historical events with political repercussions that ripple across the Italian peninsula. **Both these characteristics help Puccini raise the private events of Tosca and Cavaradossi to a more universal level,** where the characters' aspirations to happiness are crushed by politics and higher-level events beyond anyone's control.

Interestingly, the story of Tosca is not set in the time period of the premiere of the opera (nor the original French play), but one hundred years earlier, during the Napoleonic wars. **In fact, Tosca is an opera that is notoriously difficult to adapt to another time and place: the setting is very specifically the afternoon of June 17 through the early morning of June 18, 1800 in three existing locations in Rome and refers to actual historical events surrounding the Battle of Marengo.** Political tensions were incredible high, and the life or death of a single person could have far-reaching implications. For instance, Cavaradossi swears to protect the political fugitive Angelotti with his life, not only because they are friends, but because Angelotti served as the consul of the short-lived Roman Republic. Angelotti's life could influence the birth or death of a nation struggling for self-rule. Likewise, when Cavaradossi learns that Napoleon's armies have won at Marengo, in his relief he calls out "Victory! Victory!" believing that Napoleon was ushering in an era of self-determination for people across Europe.

By contrast, Tosca herself is not concerned with political questions, but with interpersonal and spiritual ones. **She expresses the lingering Romantic ideal that love can conquer all but grapples with the theological question of why God permits the suffering of the innocent.** Her prayers and laments entwine throughout the opera, converging in one of opera's most beautiful moments of stillness and reflection: Tosca's cry of the heart "Vissi d'arte" ("I lived for art"). In fact, some scholars argue that Tosca's phrase "I prayed to the Madonna and the saints in vain" is the beginning of her disillusion.

While Puccini never openly embraced atheism—contrary to his librettists—he still shared their strong anti-clerical views. Through the portrayal of the Sacristan, the opera's creators openly condemned the bigotry they saw in the Catholic Church and, through Scarpia, the use of religion for evil purposes. While Tosca's religious devotion is not easily shaken, Scarpia's unbridled cruelty challenges her understanding of justice, which emerges in the irony of her pardoning his ruthless actions. From this moment forward, Tosca's choices are limited, but she is determined to make them her own.

Ultimately, the pathos of Tosca's final moments rings out like any great Shakespearean tragedy, demonstrating the devastating consequences of a society where power is misused. Puccini as well as the librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa amplify not the victimhood of Tosca—as some historians may mistakenly argue—but her determination to resist it. They call for us to awaken to the moral decay in Tosca's Rome and challenge us to prevent these circumstances in our own world.

PUCCINI'S TRAGIC HEROINES

Composer Giacomo Puccini consistently wrote operas with strong female characters. Protagonists like Mimì in *La bohème*, Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly*, Liù in *Turandot*, Suor Angelica in the opera of the same name, and Tosca are examples of great women who defy strict expectations and choose their own fates.

Listeners have often remarked, however, that each of these women meets a tragic end—sometimes through illness, but often at her own hand. **Why might Puccini have incorporated death so often for the women of his operas?** Here are some ideas:

- First, opera as an artform, particularly during Puccini's time, used massive artistic resources: orchestra, chorus, vocalists, sets, and costumes, all galvanized by the strength of unamplified human voices. **To create a sense of balance and proportion, stories told on this scale require high stakes,** and what could offer a higher stake than a decision between life or death?
- Puccini also wrote toward the end of the Romantic era, **a time marked by resistance to authority, a challenging of inherited structures** such as monarchies and birth status, and the creation of a new social order based on merit, character, and ability. Writers, painters, poets, and musicians used their art to push back against authorities that they felt restricted an individual's freedom of choice.
- Following in the tradition of the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, Puccini was a very strong dramatist: **great opera generates strong emotional responses in an audience, and Puccini knew what would move the feelings of his listeners.**

Maria Callas as Tosca



- **Puccini may not have intended Tosca to die, after all.** Puccini in fact argued about the ending with Victorien Sardou, the author from whom he received the musical rights to adapt the original French play, *La Tosca*. Puccini wished for Tosca to collapse in a fit of madness at the end of the opera rather than die: “This morning I spent an hour at Sardou’s... He wants that poor woman dead at all costs. Now that Deibler [France’s last executioner] has had his day, the Magus [Sardou] wants to take his place!”
- **At the heart of each opera is a truth worth considering.** As we experience opera and reflect on what we have seen and heard, it teaches us something about each other and ourselves. As such, we don’t need to be involved in the escape of a political refugee to consider the depth of our moral and political convictions. (Tragically, people in many parts of the world face similar choices to this day.)

Ultimately, the pathos of Tosca’s final moments rings out like any great Shakespearian tragedy, demonstrating the devastating consequences of a society where power is misused. **Puccini amplifies not the victimhood of each woman, but her determination to resist it.** He calls for us to awaken to the moral decay around each heroine and challenges us to prevent these circumstances in our own world.



Shirley Verrett as Tosca, Yasko Sato as Cio-Cio-San,
Geraldine Ferrar as Suor Angelica

DIVING DEEPER

Continue the discussion before and after the performance by exploring resources such as these. **Spoiler Alert: Each resource shares plot spoilers.**

Tosca | Read [here](#)

Music historian Sarah Rutherford contextualizes the creation of the opera *Tosca*, and relates historical developments to important musical and dramatic moments in the opera. Highly informative!

Tosca: Plot, music, interesting facts | Watch [here](#)

A quick five-minute primer on *Tosca*—an easy-to-follow overview of the plot with helpful visuals, incorporating key musical moments, and additional insights.

O|A Insights: A listening guide to Tosca | Watch [here](#)

Opera Australia's former Associate Music Director Tony Legge explores key musical motives that inform our understanding of the opera. This video uses excerpts from the 2013 Opera Australia production of *Tosca*, an adaptation of the opera that was set during the Nazi occupation of Rome during WWII.

James Conlon's In-Depth Look at "Tosca" | Watch [here](#)

Los Angeles Opera Music Director James Conlon reviews the plot and offers a highly detailed analysis of the opera's musical motives.

Tosca | Watch [here](#)

A beautiful production and traditional interpretation of Giacomo Puccini's opera *Tosca* sung in the original Italian with English subtitles and adapted for film. Riveting performances by Maria Caniglia (acted by Franca Duval), Franco Corelli, and Giangiacomo Guelfi (acted by Afro Poli).

Tosca | Watch [here](#)

Another classic production with an all-star cast, featuring Bulgarian soprano Raina Kabaivanska in the title role.

La Tosca by Victorien Sardou | Read here [Act I](#) [Act II](#) [Act III](#) [Act IV](#) [Act V](#)

An annotated English translation of the original French play on which the opera *Tosca* is based.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Who is the composer? The person who writes the music of an opera.

On December 22, 1858, **Giacomo Puccini** (DJAH-koh-moh pooch-EE-nee) **was born into a family of musicians.** For two centuries, members of his family had served as the music director for the Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca, Italy. Initially, Puccini pursued music as the family profession, but **when he attended a performance of Verdi's *Aida*, he realized that his true calling was writing operas.**



Puccini studied at the prestigious Milan Conservatory and on graduating, connected with the music publisher Giulio Ricordi, who would become a life-long friend and advocate for Puccini's music. After the failure of his second opera, *Edgar*, Ricordi encouraged Puccini to visit Bayreuth and watch *Die Meistersinger* by Richard Wagner.

Inspired by the performance, Puccini returned to Italy to compose *Manon Lescaut*. From this opera onward, Puccini carefully selected the subjects for his operas and spent considerable time on the preparation of the librettos. **The operas in his mature style, including *La bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Tosca* all feature strong, compelling heroines whose stories end in tragedy.**

Portraying the gritty underbelly of human action—obsession, corruption, and violence—**were features associated with the late 19th to early 20th century operatic style known as *Verismo*,** meaning “realism,” from the Italian word “vero” (“true”). Puccini even brought the sounds of the real world onto the stage of *Tosca*: a cannon fires to signal Angelotti's escape, Tosca's concert is heard nearby while Scarpia interrogates Cavaradossi, and matins were announced by church bells, the pitches of which Puccini ensured matched those of actual churches in Rome.

Puccini's musical style is luxurious and richly expressive; he knew how to move an audience. Many of Puccini's operas, including *Tosca*, have also been portrayed in popular media or included as soundtracks in film and television.

Learn more by reading: [Giacomo Puccini](#) on Encyclopedia Britannica

ABOUT THE LIBRETTISTS

Who is the librettist? The person who writes the words (dialogue and lyrics) of an opera.

What does “libretto” mean? In Italian, libretto means “little book.” Early Italian opera houses printed off “little books” for audience members that had all the words written inside, so that attendees could follow what was being sung.

Luigi Illica (lou-EE-GEE EEL-lee-kah) and **Giuseppe Giacosa** (dju-ZEP-pay djah-KOH-zah) served as the librettists for the opera *Madama Butterfly*.

Illica and Giacosa began their collaboration with Puccini on the opera *Manon Lescaut*, which had been an important early success for the young composer.

Illica was a well-known Italian playwright and writer; he was resourceful and quick.

His role was to provide the first draft and details of the plot. He had a ripe imagination which, if left unchecked by Giacosa, could take the opera in unexpected tangents.



Luigi Illica



Giuseppe Giacosa

Giacosa’s role was to transform the prose text into verse, and to ensure that the dramatic arc was captured in the libretto. Giacosa was a gifted, albeit slow and methodical writer, which sometimes brought him into conflict with Puccini who hurried his librettists.

The temperaments of the two librettists were vastly different as well: Giacosa was good-natured and generous; whereas Illica was unpredictable and quick-tempered. However, **the two worked well together and complemented one another’s skills, and their collaboration resulted in some of Puccini’s most beloved operas:** *La bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Tosca*.

Learn more by reading: GIACOSA, Giuseppe on Encyclopedia Britannica and LUIGI ILLICA at Atlanta Opera.

CAREERS IN OPERA

Once an opera has been written, it takes many people to bring it to the stage, including:

Stage Director:	Determines the artistic vision; leads staging rehearsals
Conductor:	Directs music rehearsals; conducts performances
Principal Artists:	Prepare their parts; often travel from outside Calgary to perform
Orchestra:	Play instruments in orchestral rehearsals and performances
Chorus Master:	Prepares the chorus; supports off-stage singing
Chorus:	Mainly living in Calgary, these singers are auditioned each year
Rehearsal Pianist:	Plays piano for music and staging rehearsals
Supernumeraries:	Performers who have no spoken or sung lines
Production Manager:	Hires production team; secures all technical aspects of production
Set Designer:	Designs the scenery and scenic elements, and drafts the design
Lighting Designer:	Decides where lights go and creates different lighting looks
Costume Designer:	Designs costumes for all performers
Hair & Wig Designer:	Designs wigs and hairstyles for all performers
Makeup Designer:	Designs makeup looks for all performers
Fight Director:	Stages fight sequences, ensuring performer safety
Stage Manager:	Coordinates rehearsals; calls cues for cast and crew
Ass't Stage Manager:	Supports stage manager; assists cueing performers backstage
Stage Crew:	Move scenery and stage props during shows
Electrician:	Hangs lights, programs lighting board, and wires electrical fixtures
Carpenter:	Builds and installs scenery
Head of Wardrobe:	Directs all costume creation, fittings, alterations, and repairs
Head of Wigs:	Directs all wig creation, fittings, alterations, and repairs
Head of Makeup:	Directs all makeup application for performers
Head of Props:	Builds or sources all furniture and portable, non-costume items
Dresser:	Helps performers change in and out of costumes and repairs them
Make-Up Artist:	Applies make-up for all performers
General Director:	Leads and manages an opera company
Development Team:	Secures donations, sponsorships, and grant funding
Marketing Team:	Promotes the opera to the general public
Operations Team:	Coordinates day-to-day operations needs of an opera company
Finance Team:	Tracks financial operations of an opera company
Audience Serv. Team:	Sells tickets and answers public queries
Education Team:	Leads opera discovery programs for schools and communities

Stage
Managers
are in high
demand!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Use discussion and class activities to explore the questions the opera *Tosca* poses to listeners of all ages:

Begin with your sensory experience of attending an opera: What stood out to you about the opera? What caught your attention?

A musical motive (or motif) is a short musical phrase or idea that is associated with a character, emotion, or even an object. The motives gain meaning with each repetition. Consider Scarpia's theme ([here](#) 00:00-00:07), which appears:

- as the first notes of the opera
- at Scarpia's entrance
- during the climax of the powerful Te Deum

What is conveyed with each additional appearance of the same motive? What does this suggest about the development of the characters and central themes of the story?

Some historians interpret the main character of Tosca as a victim (she is manipulated and betrayed by Scarpia), **some as oblivious to her surroundings** (she is needlessly consumed by personal jealousy when violent political repressions are taking place in her hometown), **and others as a tragic heroine** (she is loyal to Cavaradossi and defiant in the face of tyranny). Consider each perspective and share which aspects you agree or disagree with.

Choose a character that you identify with or you wish to explore further: Tosca, Cavaradossi, Scarpia, or Angelotti:

- Analyze the motivations and repercussions of your character's actions.
- What is an important turning point for your character? Write a letter or speech to another character describing your feelings at this turning point.
- Write an alternate ending based on your character choosing a different path forward from this turning point.

Referring to Tosca's jealousy of other women's attentions toward her beloved Cavaradossi, Scarpia describes jealousy as a "poison" and a "falcon." Which connotations are associated with these words? How is jealousy portrayed in the opera?

At the height of the Te Deum, Scarpia cries out, “Tosca, you make me forget God!” Do you believe these words from Scarpia? Why or why not?

What did you notice about the set, costume, and lighting design in the opera?
How does it emphasize themes like oppression, resistance, and hope?

Look over the Careers in Opera page once more: were there any careers that you didn’t expect to be a part of an opera company? Are there any careers in opera you might be interested in? Choose one role to research further, including responsibilities, required skills, and salary.

Lingering questions? Send us a note or join our opera discovery programs like Opera Buddies and Unpacking Opera to learn more.

Additional Lesson Plans & Resources:

- Metropolitan Opera [Study Guide & Lesson Plans](#)
- Manitoba Opera [Study Guide](#)
- Minnesota Opera [Study Guide & Lesson Plans](#)
- Opera Philadelphia [Study Guide](#)
- Opera North [Opera Outline](#)



Ambur Braid & Gregory Dahl in Calgary Opera’s 2018 production of *Tosca*

DISCOVERING OPERA

Opera is a vibrant and ever-changing artform that combines the dramatic intensity of the theatre, heightened through music and singing.

- Operas can be long or short, with any number of people involved.
- Operas can be sung in any language.
- Operas can tell stories about any time, place, person, or issue.
- Operas are still being written today.

Operas are created by the cast, crew, and artistic production team including:

- composers, who write the music
- librettists, who write the words or “libretto”
- directors
- conductors
- singers
- instrumentalists
- dancers
- set, lighting, special effects designers
- costume and makeup designers
- fight and intimacy coordinators
- choreographers
- stage managers and technical crew
- and the audience



**Each person brings who they are as a person to the creation of an opera.
Their individual contributions shape the performance.**



Operas are not typically autobiographical, although they do use stories and music to express the personal struggles and ideals of the creators. They often also comment on important social concerns of the creators' time.

Sometimes stories from cultures not of the creators' own were used to convey universal themes. In these cases, the creators relied on imagination and empathy to enter the emotional world of someone whose specific experiences they never lived through.

When this is the case, there are also important ideas to reflect on, including:

- Who is telling whose story?
- How are they telling it?
- For what purpose?

In recent years, opera creators prefer to share their own stories or to collaborate with those whose stories they would like to tell. As such, opera also presents an important opportunity to think critically about art, as well as to go beyond the opera itself and learn more about the history, language, traditions, and stories of those represented.



UNDERSTANDING THE MUSIC OF OPERA

We understand music on its own terms by making music! By singing its melodies and harmonies, playing it and especially by improvising, we bring the music into our ears, bodies, and spirits.

To increase our musical understanding, we begin by learning by heart the melodies and rhythms we encounter. As the music of more artists becomes familiar, we begin to encounter unfamiliar music with more musical understanding.

Whether you've heard an opera once or a hundred times, there's always more to discover.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATRE

Whether you're brand new, or have been a subscriber for years, you're welcome at the opera. Here's how you can get the most out of your visit:

WHAT TIME SHOULD I ARRIVE?

We recommend you plan to arrive at the venue 45 minutes prior to the show start time. This will allow for time to find parking and take your seat without risk of missing any part of the performance.

WHAT TIME DOES THE SHOW START?

Invited Dress Rehearsals at the Jubilee Auditorium start promptly at 7:00 pm.

WHERE IS THE THEATRE?

Visit our [Getting Here](#) page for more information about our venues.

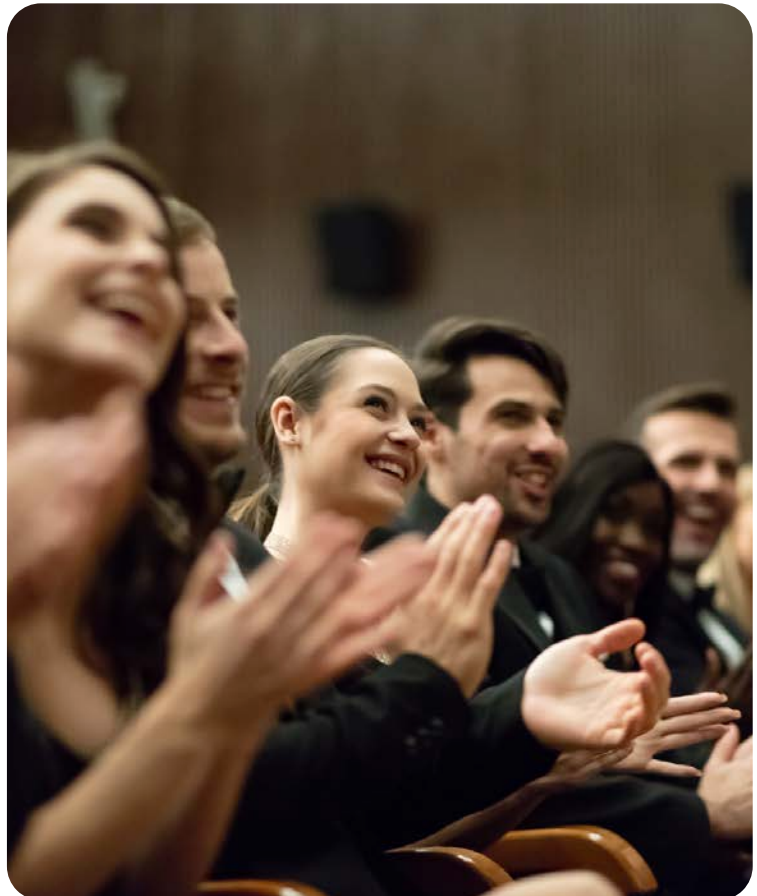
WHERE DO I PARK?

Visit our [Getting Here](#) page for more information about parking at our various venues.

ARE FOOD AND DRINKS ALLOWED INTO THE AUDITORIUM?

Drinks are allowed in the auditorium, provided they are in plastic containers.

Food is available for purchase in the lobby during intermission, although it may not be consumed in the theatre.



WHAT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE AT THE THEATRE?

The Jubilee Auditorium is fully wheelchair accessible (with the exception of the 2nd balcony) with ramps available at the north entrance. Assisted listening devices are available at the coat check. Please view our [Accessibility](#) page for more detailed information about accessibility features.

WHAT IS A DRESS REHEARSAL?

A dress rehearsal is the final on-stage rehearsal of an opera before it premieres to the public. A dress rehearsal includes nearly full production values (with costumes, sets, lights, orchestra), but the show is still a work in progress.

Some of the seats are blocked off so that the production team (director, stage manager, lighting designer, choreographer, music staff, and others) can watch the show from the theatre, take notes, and communicate with the backstage crew. Should anything need adjusting, the rehearsal might be stopped or a part repeated to make sure that it is perfect.

WHAT DO I WEAR?

You'll find people at the opera wearing a variety of styles, from jeans to jewels. Although many people enjoy dressing up when they go to the opera, there's no mandatory dress code.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHAT THEY'RE SAYING?

Surtitles will be projected above the stage, which translate the Italian words into English as the singers are performing. This is similar to watching a film in a foreign language with subtitles turned on.

DO OPERA SINGERS USE MICROPHONES?

In almost all operas, microphones are not needed. Instead, opera singers use their voices and bodies to naturally amplify the resonance of their vocal folds; they can be heard above the orchestra in large halls without amplification.

To learn more, visit calgaryopera.com/faq.

ABOUT CALGARY OPERA

Founded in 1972, Calgary Opera is one of Canada's most innovative and ambitious professional opera companies. With more than 50 events during the 2026/27 season, curious listeners of all ages can experience the wonder of opera all throughout the school year, whether as grand events at the Jubilee Auditorium or in diverse community experiences throughout our city and beyond.

Since 2007, we've offered an annual school tour production, performing for young audiences around Southern Alberta.

For over 25 years, we've offered the in-school music program Let's Create an Opera, reaching over 60,000 students.

This season, we are thrilled to partner with teachers and students at three schools for Let's Create an Opera, which will culminate in an original children's operas performed in English, French, and Blackfoot.



Throughout its 54-year history, Calgary Opera has championed new works and Canadian artists and stories. We have produced:

- 8 new works, including the internationally acclaimed opera "Filumena"
- 30 new productions (new versions of existing operas), and
- 8 Canadian premieres.

Calgary Opera's mission is to serve its entire community with innovative and inspiring stories told through the bold medium of opera. We're thrilled you'll be joining us!

To stay connected and learn more, sign up for our newsletter [here](#).

UP NEXT

CINDERELLA

DRESS REHEARSAL

FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, CHOIRS,
& LIFELONG LEARNING GROUPS

Bring a friend
or guest for

\$20
each



WED JAN 27 — 7:00 PM

Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium
1415 14 Ave Calgary, AB

To purchase tickets for groups or individuals, please call the Calgary
Opera Audience Services Team at 403-262-7286, ext 1, or email
info@calgaryopera.com.

calgaryopera.com/student-dress-rehearsal

PHOTO CREDITS

Pages 7 & 8 Detail views of The Battle of Marengo by Louis-François, Baron Lejeune.

Page 9 Photographs of the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle. *Top:* <https://roma-nonpertutti.com/en/article/131/church-of-santandrea-della-valle-a-foundation-full-of-splendor-and-elegance>. *Middle Left:* Andrea Cordeschi. *Bottom Right:* <https://www.walksinrome.com/church-of-sant-andrea-della-valle-rome.html>

Page 10 Photographs of the Palazzo Farnese. *Top:* https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/michelan/5archite/late/2farnese.html *Bottom:* <https://en.italiani.it/Farnese-Palace-in-Caprarola--a-Renaissance-masterpiece/>

Page 11 Photographs of the Castel Sant'Angelo. *Top Left:* <https://italian-traditions.com/castel-santangelo-monuments-in-rome/> *Top Right:* <https://lyssyinthecity.com/2023/09/05/rome-castel-sant-angelo/> *Bottom Left:* <https://www.archeoroma.org/sites/castel-sant-angelo/the-statue-of-archangel-michael-the-top-of-the-castel-santangelo/>

Page 12 Photograph of Renata Tebaldi and Tito Gobbi in *Tosca*. https://www.instagram.com/p/DJQ6nE_ziIT/

Page 15 Photograph of Maria Callas as *Tosca*. PhotoPic. Paris.

Page 16 *Bottom Left:* Shirley Verrett as *Tosca*. <https://www.opera.co.uk/features/shirley-verrett-1931-2010/> *Bottom Middle:* Geraldine Ferrar as Suor Angelica. <https://christophercpurdy.blogspot.com/2006/10/sister-angelica.html>. *Bottom Right:* Yasko Sato as Cio-Cio-San for Calgary Opera's 2025 production of *Madama Butterfly*. HarderLee Photography.

Page 18 Portrait of Giacomo Puccini. Unknown studio. Public domain.

Page 19 *Left:* Portrait of Luigi Illica. Archivio storico Ricordi. *Right:* Portrait of Giuseppe Giacomini. Encyclopædia Britannica.

Page 22 Ambur Braid & Gregory Dahl in Calgary Opera's 2018 production of *Tosca*. Trudie Lee Photography.

Page 23 *Right:* Lucia Cesaroni and Talise Trevigne in Calgary Opera's *The Marriage of Figaro*. HarderLee Photography. 2023. *Bottom:* Audience members attending Calgary Opera's *WonderLand*. 2024.

Page 24 Students participate in Calgary Opera's *Let's Create an Opera*.

Page 25 Canva image used with permission.

Page 27 *Upper right:* Calgary Opera's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*
Lower left: Students participate in Calgary Opera's *Let's Create an Opera*

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