

## The Rest of the Opera

**Act II** takes place in Scarpia's apartment at the **Palazzo Farnese**. Tosca is singing a cantata elsewhere in the building, and Scarpia orders that she be brought to him when it is over. Meanwhile, his agents report that there is no sign of Angelotti at the villa, but that they have captured Cavaradossi. Scarpia puts him into the adjoining room, which will serve as a torture chamber while he entertains Tosca to supper. As expected, her lover's screams force her to reveal the hiding place, in a well in the garden. Scarpia signs Cavaradossi's death sentence, but indicates to Tosca that he will be spared if she will sleep with him. Of course he will have to go through the motions and arrange a firing-squad, albeit with blank bullets. After demanding a note of safe passage, she reluctantly agrees—but then sees a knife on the dinner table with which she stabs Scarpia as he lunges at her. Placing candles at his head and a crucifix on his breast, she leaves the room.

**Act III** opens at dawn on the roof of the **Castel Sant'Angelo**, where Cavaradossi prepares for his execution. He asks permission to write a last letter to Tosca, but then she herself arrives, to tell him what she has done and explain the mock execution. As an experienced stage actress, she coaches him how to fall convincingly, then watches as the soldiers arrive with their rifles. But the bullets are not blanks; Scarpia has had the last word. On the verge of being arrested for his murder, Tosca throws herself off the battlements to her death.

For more detail and lots of color, see the class website:

<http://www.brunyate.com/RenInstOpera/>

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## Great Scenes in Opera



9. Tosca

April 9, 2026

# 9. Tosca

TOSCA IS THE TRAGIC HEROINE OF THE EPONYMOUS PLAY written by **Victorien Sardou** in 1887. The opera by **Giacomo Puccini** (1858–1924), premiered in 1900, after *Manon Lescaut* (1893) and *La bohème* (1896), making it his third consecutive opera with a French source. In the manner of French “well-made play” (a Sardou specialty), the action takes place within 24 hours in June 1800, occupying a unique window in time. Napoleon has conquered north and central Italy without much opposition, but then returned to Paris, leaving Rome in the charge of elected Consuls. Seeing an opportunity, the Kingdom of Naples has invaded Rome, imprisoned the Consuls, and set up a police state to control opposition. Now Napoleon has crossed the Alps once more. In the first act, news arrives that he has been defeated at the Battle of Marengo, and there is an official celebration. But at a crucial moment in the second act, the news will arrive that Napoleon’s troops have rallied and he is indeed the victor. The days of Neapolitan control are numbered. *rb.*

## A. Setting, History, Music

To provide some context to the opera, we give a brief overview of the historical background (as above), the three real Roman settings in which each of the acts takes place, and Puccini’s technique of studding his score with arias in such a way that its continuity and momentum is never interrupted. Most illustrations in this section come from a production at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London.

**Puccini:** *Tosca*, plot synopsis (Nancy Durrant)

**Puccini:** *Tosca*, “Recondita armonia” (Jonas Kaufmann, *Cavaradossi*)

**Puccini:** *Tosca*, “Non la sospiri la nostra casetta” (Met 2018, Sonya Yoncheva, *Tosca*; Vittorio Grigolo, *Cavaradossi*)

**Puccini:** *Tosca*, “Tre sbirri, una carrozza” (Alexey Markov, *Scarpia*)

## B. The First Twist of the Screw

**Act I** opens with the former Consul, **Cesare Angelotti**, who has escaped from prison, taking refuge in the family chapel at **Sant’Andrea della Valle**, where his sister has provided some women’s clothes as disguise and some food. He hides when the church **Sacristan** arrives, followed by the painter **Mario Cavaradossi**, a political liberal, who happens to have been using Angelotti’s sister (referred to by her married name, Marchesa Attavanti) as a model for his painting of Mary Magdalene.

Angelotti makes himself known to Cavaradossi, but they are interrupted by the latter’s lover, the singer **Floria Tosca**. As passionate as she is pious, she suspects him of seeing some other lover in the chapel, especially as the blonde woman in the painting has a coloring so different from her own. But Cavaradossi calms her down, and she leaves. Quickly, the painter gives Angelotti directions to hide at the country villa he shares with Tosca.

The Sacristan enters with the news that Napoleon has been defeated at Marengo, and there is to be a big celebration. The excitement of the choirboys is interrupted by the arrival of **Baron Scarpia**, chief of the secret police, who is on the hunt for Angelotti. His agents find some clues in the empty chapel, and Scarpia forms a pretty good idea of what must have happened. When Tosca reappears, Scarpia works on her jealousy, in the hope that she will eventually give up both her lover and the escaped man. She leaves and, ordering his agents to follow her, Scarpia gloats in the anticipation of taking Tosca and executing Cavaradossi both on the same night, his aria set against the beginning of the ceremonial *Te Deum* sung by clergy, choir, and congregation.

**Puccini:** *Tosca*, Act I, complete (1992 film in the actual settings; Plácido Domingo, *Cavaradossi*; Catherine Malfitano, *Tosca*; Ruggero Raimondi, *Scarpia*; Zubin Mehta, *conductor*)