

## Chronology of the Genesis of Puccini's *Tosca*

24 November 1887 – first performance in Paris of the play *La Tosca* by Victorien Sardou (1831-1908), one of the most prominent playwrights of late 19th-century France; the title character is portrayed by Sarah Bernhardt, the most famous actress of the day

early spring 1889 – Ferdinando Fontana, the librettist of Puccini's operas *Le villi* and *Edgar*, first suggests the subject matter of *Tosca* to the composer; Puccini becomes acquainted with the play from Fontana without seeing it performed; on 7 May 1889, he writes to Giulio Ricordi telling him that the subject seems perfect for him; he says it would be “an opera without excessive proportions, one not conceived as a decorative spectacle and not requiring the usual superabundance of music.”

early 1890's – series of intrigues with the playwright Sardou and various composers who want to write music for the play; due to copyright laws, Sardou's permission is needed to have the subject set as an opera, but at first, he does not wish to allow it, because he is not satisfied that Puccini is well enough established as a composer; Verdi considers the project seriously, but in the end feels that he is too old to proceed; furthermore, he wants the story adapted to accommodate a different ending; a rival composer, Alberto Franchetti, signs a contract with Ricordi to produce a setting with a libretto by the poet Luigi Illica (1857-1916)

autumn 1894 – Franchetti and Illica travel to Paris to discuss an operatic adaptation with Sardou; Verdi, a friend of Sardou, is present for one of the sessions and is quite enthusiastic about the suitability of a draft libretto for setting as an opera; Puccini learns of this meeting, as does Giulio Ricordi; in collaboration, they set out to dissuade Franchetti from the idea of completing a setting, so that Puccini, who was much more likely to produce a successful version, would have the opportunity to do so; they tell Franchetti that the subject matter is too violent for Italian audiences and that the title character would be unsympathetic because she is a murderess

autumn 1895 – Ricordi and Puccini's efforts to dissuade Franchetti from setting a *Tosca* opera succeed; he renounces his contract with Ricordi for the project; Puccini is now free to proceed with his own setting; Franchetti was never told that Puccini was planning to compose a setting of his own all along

May 1896 – Puccini meets Sardou for the first time at the time of the first production of *La bohème* in Paris; Sardou agrees to every idea he hears for the adaptation of his play

October 1896 – Ricordi tells Puccini that Verdi is delighted that Puccini will be the one to treat the subject; Puccini is in possession of Acts I and II of the libretto; a second poet, Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906), a collaborator with Illica on the librettos for *Manon Lescaut*, *La bohème*, and *Madama Butterfly*, is brought in to help with the libretto, even though it soon becomes clear that he hates Sardou's play; it is Illica's responsibility to draw up the scenario and developed the plot in detail; Giacosa is responsible for versifying the prose text of the original

spring 1898 – Work on the composition begins in earnest

autumn 1899 – Puccini finishes the music after several arguments with Illica about the scenario; Puccini wins all arguments

October 1899 – Giulio Ricordi strongly objects to the character of the love duet in Act III as insufficiently interesting in musical terms, but Puccini refuses to change it

14 January 1900 - first performance on 14 January 1900 at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome; first reactions are mixed; as Puccini and Ricordi had warned Franchetti, many audience members and critics find the action too violent and the title character unsympathetic, but the brilliance of the musical setting is soon realized as it is quickly produced in other cities throughout the world

4 February 1901 – The first performance of *Tosca* in the United States (at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City); it is an immediate hit

October 1903 – The first performance in Paris; the beamingly proud Sardou takes full command of the rehearsals as if he were responsible for the entire work; in the end, he agrees that the operatic setting is superior to the original play for dramatic effectiveness

## The Characters of Puccini's *Tosca*

Floria Tosca – soprano – an opera singer. Information about her background is found in the original play of Victorien Sardou, but not in the Puccini opera. In the play, she was a foundling (probably born out of wedlock) who was raised by nuns in a convent in Verona. She learned music from the organist at the convent and had a certain reputation as a singer of sacred music already by the age of sixteen. The composer Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801) discovered her singing at the convent and assisted her in beginning an operatic career. She was soon the toast of Italy. She came to Rome early in the year 1800 because a new star was needed to revitalize the opera houses—all of the new operas given early in the year were failures. The enjoyment of female stars was something new to operatic culture in Rome in 1800. The popes who ruled Rome before the French occupation of 1798 did not permit females to appear in operatic productions. Earlier, all female parts were performed by men, especially castratos, dressed in women's clothing. Sardou carefully studied the biographies of several notable singers of the 1790's to create the character of Tosca. Her name may have been derived from the title character of a popular opera of Luigi Cherubini: *La Lodoïska* (1791).

Mario Cavaradossi – tenor – a painter. Painters from all over Europe flocked to Rome for centuries to gain inspiration from its artistic and architectural treasures. In the Sardou play, the painter Cavaradossi, with radical political sympathies, arrives in Rome in the last days of September 1799, at the time when the French were expelled. His father was Nicolas Cavaradossi, a member of a noble Roman family, who had left for the intellectually stimulating environment of Paris decades earlier, before Mario was born. It is believed that the family name was chosen as a variant of “Caravadossi,” a prominent noble family in Nice. In fact, many French artists avoided Rome in this period due to the political instability in Italy. At this time, none of the winners of the prestigious Prix de Rome, a stipend from the French government to study in Rome, actually took up residence there.

Baron Vitellio Scarpia – baritone – chief of police in Rome. In the Sardou play, this character arrived in Rome only in June of 1800. A Sicilian (i.e., an ethnicity associated with barbarity and ruthlessness), he was brought to Rome because the regime of the governor, Diego Naselli, was not successful enough in suppressing political opposition. Scarpia had participated in the brutal repression of republican sympathizers after the collapse of the Parthenopean Republic in Naples in June of 1799. It was hoped that he would act with similar efficiency in Rome. The name of the actual police chief in Rome at this time is known (Cavaliere Guglielmi). No political prisoners were executed in Rome in June of 1800. Some believe that the name “Scarpia” might derive from the Italian verb *scarificare* (to “scarify” or “make scars”); others believe that it might derive from *sciarpa* (a “scarf” or “sash”), an item of paramilitary clothing worn by counter-revolutionaries at the time of the suppression of the Parthenopean Republic.

Cesare Angelotti – bass – a political prisoner. A noble, he is identified as a “consul” in the former French puppet government of Rome that was in power during the years 1798 and 1799. His escape from jail is the cause of all of Tosca and Cavaradossi’s political troubles in the Puccini opera. His sister, the Marchesa Attavanti, is never portrayed in the opera, but occasionally referred to in the first act. Her husband’s family at one time endowed a chapel in the church of Sant’Andrea delle Valle, where Angelotti hides at the start of the opera

The Sacristan (*sagrestano*) – baritone – a sacristan is an officer of a church in charge of the sacristy (a room where sacred utensils and vestments are kept) and ceremonial equipment; in Puccini’s *Tosca* he is something like a janitor, the only character with obvious comic attributes, especially a sardonic wit

Spoletta – baritone – Baron Scarpia’s henchman

Sciarrone – bass – a policeman in the service of Baron Scarpia

A jailer (*carceriere*) – bass – sometimes sung by the same person who performs the role of Sciarrone, since they never appear together on stage

A shepherd (*pastore*) – boy soprano

Supernumeraries:

A cardinal

A judge

Roberti the executioner

A scribe

An officer

Soldiers

Police

Ladies

Nobles

Bourgeois

Populace of Rome

## *Tosca* Synopsis

The action takes place in Rome in June of 1800  
(in the original play of Victorien Sardou, a date of 17 June 1800 is specified)

Act I – The setting is the interior of the Church of Sant’Andrea della Valle; at the right is the Attavanti Chapel, on the left scaffolding, on which stands a large picture on an easel covered by a piece of cloth; painter’s tools lie about, also a basket

A political prisoner, Cesare Angelotti, enters stealthily, having just escaped from the Castel Sant’Angelo with the help of his sister, the Marchesa Attavanti, who has left him some clothes in the church and the key to the Attavanti Chapel, where he can hide and disguise himself (as a woman). When Angelotti is hidden, the painter Mario Cavaradossi comes in to resume work on a painting of Mary Magdalen.

The sacristan points out a resemblance between the Magdalen in the painting and a strange lady who has been coming often to the church recently (in fact, the Marchesa Attavanti). Cavaradossi ponders the curious harmony of this stranger’s beauty with that of his beloved Tosca. Then Angelotti reappears and recognizes Cavaradossi, an old friend and political ally.

Cavaradossi promises to help, but their talk is interrupted by the arrival of Tosca. She has entered the church partly to worship and partly to visit her lover Cavaradossi, whom she knew would be in the church painting. Angelotti hides, and Cavaradossi has to deal with Tosca’s jealous suspicions. She does not know that the church was locked in order to hide Angelotti, not to help conceal a tryst with a rival. Tosca heard Cavaradossi talking with somebody; she imagines it to be a rival, specifically the woman being painted as Mary Magdalen. Tosca believes Cavaradossi when he says that he has not been talking to another woman, offers flowers at an altar dedicated to the Virgin, and makes arrangements to meet Cavaradossi at his villa after her singing engagement that evening. Once Tosca has left, Angelotti comes out of his hiding place. Cavaradossi takes him away in order to conceal him at his villa outside the city of Rome.

The sacristan comes in to announce the defeat of Napoleon (falsely, at the battle of Marengo on June 15), but Cavaradossi has gone. There is a sudden eruption of choristers and acolytes, who excitedly prepare a *Te Deum* to celebrate the victory of the royalists over Napoleon, but the arrival of Scarpia silences them. Angelotti has been traced to the church. Cavaradossi’s empty lunch basket is found in the Attavanti Chapel. This discovery throws suspicion on the painter. When Tosca comes back and is disturbed not to find Cavaradossi, Scarpia cleverly uses the Marchesa Attavanti’s fan, also discovered in the church (among the women’s clothing that were to be used to disguise her brother), to play on Tosca’s jealousy and trap Cavaradossi.

Tosca rushes out to go to Cavaradossi’s villa—she believes that he will find him there with the Marchesa Attavanti and wants to confront him with his unfaithfulness. Scarpia sends his henchman Spoletta after her in order to capture both Angelotti and

Cavaradossi at the same time. During the *Te Deum*, Scarpia expresses his desire to have Cavaradossi executed and possess the beautiful Tosca.

Act II – The setting is Scarpia's apartments in the Palazzo Farnese at night; a table is laid for supper; a window overlooks the courtyard of the Palazzo

The Queen of Naples, Maria Carolina, is holding celebrations for the defeat of Napoleon. Spoletta arrives with the news that Angelotti could not be found in Cavaradossi's villa. The painter himself is brought in to be questioned, but he refuses to say anything. Tosca, summoned by a note from Scarpia, also arrives, and Cavaradossi, in a whisper, tells her to reveal nothing about Angelotti. After visiting the villa, Tosca knows the truth and no longer suspects Cavaradossi of being unfaithful. Scarpia has Cavaradossi tortured, but he keeps silent about Angelotti's whereabouts. Tosca cannot bear to see Cavaradossi tortured and reveals Angelotti's hiding place in the well of the garden on the grounds of the villa. Cavaradossi reproaches her bitterly, but his anger turns to joy when Scarpia's agent Sciarrone rushes in with the news that the Battle of Marengo has really been won by Napoleon, not by the royalists, as first reported.

Cavaradossi's gloating and taunting infuriate Scarpia, who has him taken to the Castel Sant'Angelo to be executed at dawn. Tosca pleads for mercy, and Spoletta returns to report that Angelotti has killed himself rather than be captured. Once he is alone with Tosca, Scarpia offers her a revolting bargain: sexual favors in return for Cavaradossi's life. She agrees on condition that she and Mario be allowed to flee the country immediately afterward. Scarpia then explains that there will be a mock execution. As he is writing out the safe-conduct for Tosca and Cavaradossi, Tosca spies a sharp knife on the table. She conceals it behind her back, and when Scarpia comes to claim his part of the bargain, she plunges the knife into his back and kills him.

Act III – The setting is a parapet on top of the Castel Sant'Angelo, just before dawn; to the left is a fortified position from which guns would be fired, a table with a lamp on it, a large grille with shutters, writing materials, a bench, and a stool; hung on the wall is a crucifix with a votive light in front of it; to the right can be seen the opening of a small staircase leading up to the parapet; in the background can be seen the Vatican and St. Peter's church

A shepherd is heard singing. Mario is brought in and left alone, to think of Tosca and his life, which must now end. But Tosca arrives, gives him the good news of his planned escape, and confesses that she has murdered Scarpia for his sake. They sing of their love and their fortune. The execution takes place. Tosca calls Cavaradossi to rise, then discovers to her horror that Scarpia has cheated her. The bullets from the firing squad were real, and Cavaradossi is dead. Spoletta, who has now found Scarpia's body, now comes rushing up with some soldiers to arrest Tosca. She kills herself by jumping off the ramparts of the fortress.

### Political Events of Relevance to the Story of *Tosca*

- 1789 – 17 June – In France, deputies of the Estates General declare themselves a National Assembly, soon to be known as the National Constituent Assembly
- 14 July – Storming of the Bastille in Paris, the signal event marking the beginning of the French Revolution; by August, the government of France is transformed into a constitutional monarchy
- 19 December – Land belonging to the Catholic church in France is nationalized and put up for sale
- 1790 – 12 July – The Civil Constitution of the Clergy nationalizes all church property and seeks to make all clergy salaried employees of the French state; church income earlier sent to the pope in Rome from France is cut off; many clerics refuse to take the required oath to uphold the French constitution, some flee to Rome, some stay in France as “refractory priests”
- 1791 – March/April - Pope Pius VI denounces the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and its oath to the French state and refuses to recognize new ordinations from the state French church; in retaliation France annexes the papal enclaves of Avignon and Venaissin
- 1 October – The National Constituent Assembly in France is replaced by the Legislative Assembly as the government of France
- 1792 – 20 April – France declares war on Austria for its part in sheltering royalist émigrés and for trying to restore absolute monarchy within France itself; French radicals hope to use the war to spread the ideals of the French Revolution throughout Europe
- 20 September – The Legislative Assembly is replaced by the more radical National Convention as the government of France
- 1793 – 21 January – Execution of King Louis XVI of France; a “Reign of Terror” under the Committee of Public Safety, an executive committee of the National Convention, lasts until the downfall of its leader Robespierre in 1794
- 1795 – 5 October – In the final phase of civil disturbances in opposition to the radical policies of the National Convention, the young general Napoleon Bonaparte is deployed to quell a rebellion against the government; by November, the National Convention is replaced by the Directory, a committee of powerful political figures, one an ally of Napoleon
- 1796 – 28 April – An invasion of Piedmont (in northwest Italy) organized by Napoleon Bonaparte results in major territorial concessions from its ruler, the king of Sardinia; the invasion was ordered by the Directory as a part of its efforts to attack and defeat Austria, which controlled the duchy of Milan (roughly the modern Italian province of Lombardy) and the grand duchy of Tuscany

- 31 May – French conquest of Lombardy is completed; Napoleon plans to continue his campaign to Vienna, but he does not succeed at this time
- 27 December – The Cispadane Republic is formed from territories belonging to the pope and the duke of Modena
  
- 1797 – 19 February – Napoleon forces Pope Pius VI to accept the Treaty of Tolentino, which ratifies the loss of Bologna, Ferrara, and the Romagna to the Cispadane Republic and makes him pay the French a huge indemnity for trying to defend them from French occupation, including the transportation of cartloads of art treasures to Paris
- 14 May – The French occupy Venice; the last doge abdicates the next day
- 6 June – The Ligurian Republic is formed from territories belonging to the Republic of Genoa
- 29 June – The Cisalpine Republic is formed from territories belonging to the duchy of Milan
- 27 July – The Cispadane Republic is joined to the Cisalpine Republic
- 17 October – The Treaty of Campo Formio is signed; the Austrian Netherlands (equivalent to modern-day Belgium) and Lombardy are ceded to France by Austria in return for territories formerly belonging to the old Venetian Republic
- 29 November – Napoleon leaves Italy for the time being in order to mount a military campaign in Egypt that lasts until 1799; in the end, the Egyptian campaign is a disaster, but does not harm Napoleon's standing as a political figure in France
- 28 December – Death of General Duphot, a member of the French diplomatic mission in Rome, during a mêlée between pro- and anti-papal street mobs
  
- 1798 – 11 February – French forces invade Rome in retaliation for the death of General Duphot
- 15 February – A Roman Republic is proclaimed by the French General Berthier; Pope Pius VI flees Rome for Siena, then Florence
- 25 February – A popular revolt against French rule is brutally crushed; executions for opposition to French rule are common in Rome from this time until the collapse of the Roman Republic the following year
- 24 November – With the encouragement of British admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, Rome is occupied by the armies of Ferdinand IV, king of Naples
- 27 November – King Ferdinand IV and Queen Maria Carolina of Naples enter Rome, but are soon expelled by the French and pursued back to Naples
- 23 December – The Neapolitan royal family flees Naples for Sicily; earlier in the month a new coalition against France is organized by Austria, Great Britain, and Russia
  
- 1799 – 11 January – King Ferdinand IV is deposed and a French-dominated Parthenopean Republic is proclaimed in Naples
- 28 March – The French Directory has Pius VI kidnapped and moved to Turin
- 28 April – A Russian army enters Milan (capital of Lombardy)



- 30 April – The French Directory orders Pius VI moved to Briançon
  - 26 May – A Russian army enters Turin (capital of Piedmont)
  - 15 June – Royalist forces under Cardinal Ruffo and the Sanfedisti re-take Naples for the royal family, however the king remains in Palermo in Sicily; many republican sympathizers are brutally executed upon the restoration of absolute monarchy in the kingdom of Naples
  - 13 July – The French Directory orders Pius VI moved to Valence
  - 29 August – Pope Pius VI dies at the age of 81 in Valence; considering the political situation in Europe, many observers believe that no new pope will ever be elected
  - 30 September – An assault by the British navy and Neapolitan army forces the French to evacuate Rome; the French-dominated Roman Republic collapses; many republican sympathizers flee the city, many others choose to stay; Rome is soon occupied by Neapolitan, English, Austrian, Russian, and Turkish troops
  - 10 October – Diego Naselli, the new governor of Rome, arrives from the Neapolitan court in Palermo; a Sicilian, he installs himself in the Palazzo Farnese ruling in cooperation with a *Giunta di Stato* (Governing Committee) dominated by Neapolitans; Naselli's rule is inefficient and fails to stem either rampant crime or political dissent in the city of Rome
  - 9-10 November – Napoleon Bonaparte's brother Lucien stages a coup d'état against the Directory in France; Napoleon had returned to France from Egypt in October in order to address the weakness of France against the new coalition led by Austria and Russia
  - December – The Directory in France is replaced by the Consulate, with Napoleon Bonaparte as First Consul and de facto ruler of France; by this time the French had essentially been expelled from Italy except for the territories of the old Republic of Genoa
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- 1800 – 14 March – Under Austrian protection, Cardinal Chiaramonti is elected pope in Venice as Pius VII; with the papal regalia looted by the French, he is crowned on 21 March with a papier-mâché tiara in the church of San Giorgio Maggiore
  - 15 May – Napoleon's army crosses into Italy; war with Austria is renewed
  - 2 June – The French surrender Genoa to the Austrians while Napoleon enters Milan
  - 15 June – The Battle of Marengo in northwest Italy, a stunning victory for the French over the Austrians
  - 22 June – Diego Naselli, governor of Rome, cedes authority back to a commission of cardinals in accordance with a political agreement brokered by King Ferdinand IV of Naples and leaves the city
  - 3 July – Pope Pius VII returns to Rome

## *Tosca* Travelogue

### Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle

Located in central Rome along the Corso Vittorio Emanuele. It is within walking distance of both the Palazzo Farnese and the Castel Sant'Angelo but was probably chosen by Sardou as a setting for his play because in 1800, it was the nearest church to the Teatro Argentina, which had been one of the most important opera theaters in Rome since 1730. Tosca presumably would have been performing there during her stay in the city and could easily interrupt her rehearsals for visits with her lover Caravadossi in addition to her frequent religious worship. The church was begun in 1591. It has the largest dome in Rome except for St. Peter's. The façade, completed in 1665, was beautifully restored in 1991. The interior has no aisles, which lends an imposing spaciousness to the interior. There are many chapels in the church, but none quite matches the description of the Attavanti Chapel depicted in the play and the opera.

### Palazzo Farnese

A magnificent Renaissance palace located near the Tiber River on the Piazza Farnese, now the home of the French Embassy in Rome. The palace is named for its original builder, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, later Pope Paul III (r. 1534-49), a worldly cleric who loved luxury and entertainment. The upper stories were finished by Michelangelo after the pope's death. In the 18th century, the palace became the property of the Bourbons of Naples, which is to say the family of King Ferdinand IV of Naples and his wife Maria Carolina. This is why the setting was chosen as the seat of the temporary Roman government in 1800 and the venue for celebrations sponsored by Queen Maria Carolina. During most of the 18th century, the kingdom of Naples and Sicily was ruled by cadet members of the Spanish royal house, which fell to the Bourbon dynasty in the year 1700. The Spanish kings chose not to rule it directly, even though they could have if they had chosen to. The first Bourbon king of Spain was Philip V, a grandson of Louis XIV of France. King Ferdinand IV was second cousin once removed of King Louis XVI of France. His wife Maria Carolina was a sister of Queen Marie Antoinette.

### Castel Sant'Angelo

A fortress across the Ponte Sant'Angelo and Tiber River to the north and west of the Palazzo Farnese close to the Vatican. It was begun in 130 A.D. as a mausoleum for the emperor Hadrian. In the early Middle Ages, it was fortified to function as the citadel of Rome. For centuries, it was frequently used by the popes as a residence and refuge, most famously during a sack of Rome that took place in the year 1527. Much of the original structure remains.