

"Leontyne Price was an excellent Tosca. Her luscious, smoky tone made her an alluring diva and she phrased in long, generous lines. She recorded the role twice in the studio. Her first, with Herbert von Karajan wrapping her in the plush velvet of the Vienna Philharmonic, is by far the best, paired as she is with Taddei, my favourite Scarpia. Put simply, Taddei has all the vocal nuance of Gobbi but with a much richer instrument. His Scarpia is truly frightening. Di Stefano is past his prime but remains a lovable Cavaradossi and the Decca recording (John Culshaw) still sounds incredible. I quibble with some of Karajan's choices, where he wallows in orchestral sonority over driving the action forward, but this is a top-drawer choice." – Mark Pullinger, *Gramophone*, August 2022

"We have been needing a new *Tosca* for a long time. Admittedly as a performance the Callas/Gobbi/de Sabata set is never likely to be surpassed, but the recording now shows its age, and stereo after all is specially welcome in an opera which has us revelling in cantatas, shepherd songs and bell-effects off-stage. The earlier RCA set is practically ruled out by Leinsdorf's funereal conducting and the later Tebaldi by the combination of del Monaco's coarseness and George London's unfocused singing as Scarpia. Last year there were rumours of a new Callas version being prepared with Maazel conducting, but alas plans came to nothing.

All of which leaves the field wide open for the new set, and with joy I am able to report that on the whole it fills just the place I hoped it would. After her *Butterfly* I feared that Leontyne Price might spoil the characterization of Tosca too by trying too hard, by injecting those uncomfortable shrieks and laughs which are sometimes a substitute for characterization. But like Tebaldi before her Price gives a comparatively straight performance. This is not to say it lacks conviction in any way dramatically: just that it does not have the characterful dominance of a Callas performance. When Price in the Act 1 love duet tells her lover to give the painting of the Magdalene black eyes and not blue ones like the Marchesa Attavanti's ('Ma falli occhi neri'), Price's wistfulness is merely engaging without the fascinating, ominous overtones of Callas's enunciation of the phrase.

But vocally this is not a performance I would fault at all. Price pours forth a flood of rich, glorious tone and her attention to detail is exemplary with the little gracenotes on the 'Mia gelosa' theme from Act 1 done with superb clarity. Her 'Vissi d'arte' is predictably beautiful, from memory more moving than her account on a recent recital disc. And when it comes to the famous words of obituary on Scarpia, 'E avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma', Price wisely opts out of a snarl or even a chesty throb, and simply sings the notes straight with a hint of agonized exhaustion. Some may find it dramatically disappointing, but at this very point in the coda to the act Karajan is at his most intense..." – Edward Greenfield, *The Gramophone*, November 1963

As these two reviews, nearly 60 years apart, imply, Leontyne Price's 1962 *Tosca* is one that that has rarely been out of the best-of-all-time lists. And while it has received high resolution digital reissues in recent years, I would argue that what it's really needed is the kind of sonic dusting-down that XR remastering brings to it. There remains the odd clunky edit around sound effects, but otherwise this new edition really does bring the production into the 21st century, only serving to emphasize what a brilliant job producer John Culshaw had done in Vienna 63 years ago.

Andrew Rose



disc one
(44:54)

act one

1. Ah! Finalmente! (2:05)
2. E sempre lava! (3:21)
3. Dammi i colori ... Recondita armonia (4:22)
4. Voi Cavaradossi! (1:00)
5. Mario! Mario! Mario! (12:30)
6. E' buona la mia Tosca (3:13)
7. Sommo giubilo, Eccellenza! (1:38)
8. Un tal baccano in chiesa! (4:01)
9. Or tutto è chiaro (7:38)
10. Tre sbirri una carrozza (5:06)

disc two
(68:04)

act two

1. Tosca è un buon falco! (2:51)
2. Ha più forte sapore (1:29)
3. O galantuomo come andò la caccia? (3:51)
4. Ov'è Angelotti (3:48)
5. Sciarrone, che dice il Cavalier (2:55)
6. Orsù, Tosca, parlate (3:36)
7. Floria... Amore... (1:28)
8. Vittoria! Vittoria! (2:39)
9. Quanto? (4:44)
10. Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore (4:44)
11. Chi è là? (1:52)
12. Io tenni la promessa (6:39)

act three

13. Io de' sospiri (5:29)
14. Mario Cavaradossi? (4:09)
15. E lucevan le stelle (3:02)
16. Ah! Franchigia a floria Tosca... (2:42)
17. O dolci mani Mansuete e pure (8:18)
18. Come è lunga l'attesa! (2:24)
19. Presto, su! Mario! (1:24)

Vienna State Opera Chorus
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by Herbert von Karajan

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PACO 223

CAST

Leontyne Price (*soprano*) - Floria Tosca
Giuseppe di Stefano (*tenor*) - Cavaradossi
Giuseppe Taddei (*baritone*) - Scarpia
Carlo Cava (*bass*) - Angelotti
Piero de Palma (*tenor*) - Spoletta
Herbert Weiss (*treble*) - Shepherd Boy
Leonardo Monreale (*bass*) - Sciarrone
Alfredo Marriotti (*bass*) - Gaoler
Fernando Corena (*bass*) - Sacristan

Recorded Sofiensaal, Vienna,
24-30 September 1962
Sound effects recorded
6 & 9 December 1962
Producer: John Culshaw
Engineer: Gordon Parry

Stereo XR remastering: Andrew Rose
Cover artwork: Leontyne Price as Tosca

Total duration: 1hr 52:58

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