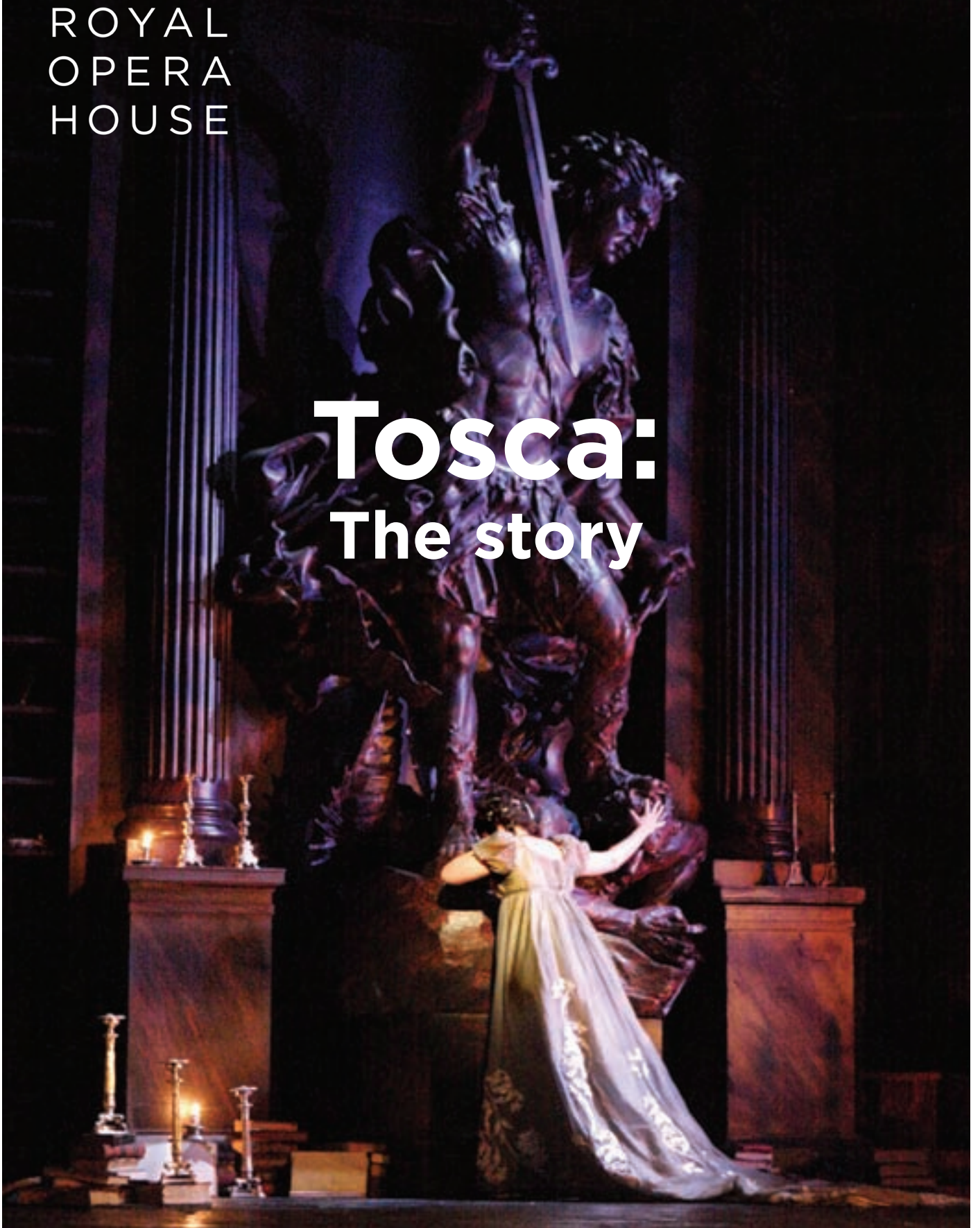




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Tosca: The story



The events take place in Rome on 17 and 18 June 1800. The liberal Roman republic has collapsed, and Rome is under the joint rule of the King of Naples and the Austrian government (the Austrians ruled much of Italy in the early 19th century).

Baron Scarpia, a Sicilian, has been sent to Rome to keep order in the city and to punish former leaders of the Roman republic. Meanwhile, Napoleon Bonaparte, ruler of France, is determined to drive the Austrians out of Italy and set up a new republic there, and is organizing his soldiers to fight the Austrian troops at the Battle of Marengo.

ACT I

The church of Sant'Andrea della Valle

Cesare Angelotti, former Consul of the Roman Republic (an important republican politician), has escaped from the Castel Sant'Angelo where he has been held as a political prisoner, and now seeks refuge in the Attavanti chapel. His sister, the Marchesa Attavanti, has left the key of the chapel hidden at the foot of the Madonna's statue.

The Sacristan (a church official, who looks after the church and all the valuables within it) arrives and realizes that the painter Mario Cavaradossi is not yet back at his work and has not touched the food left for him. The Angelus (a prayer to the Virgin Mary, sung three times daily as part of Catholic church ritual) sounds as Cavaradossi arrives.

Cavaradossi shocks the Sacristan by admitting that the portrait he is working on of Mary Magdalen has been inspired both by his lover, the singer Floria Tosca, and the Marchesa Attavanti, whose devout prayers in the chapel, noticed by Cavaradossi, in fact masked her leaving a disguise of women's clothes to aid her brother's escape. When the Sacristan leaves, Angelotti (thinking he is again alone) comes out of the chapel only to meet Cavaradossi; fortunately, the painter, a republican sympathizer, recognizes him and promises to help him after nightfall. Tosca's voice is heard calling Cavaradossi. He thrusts his basket of food into Angelotti's hands and hurries him back into hiding in the chapel.

Tosca enters and thinks that Cavaradossi has been talking to another woman. He calms her and she pleads with him to take her to his villa that night. Her gaze falls on the portrait and in it she recognizes the features

of the Marchesa Attavanti; again Cavaradossi reassures her, asking her what eyes could be more beautiful than her own. After Tosca has gone, Cavaradossi calls Angelotti out from the chapel. A cannon shot announces that Angelotti's escape has been discovered; Cavaradossi suggests Angelotti hides in a disused well in the grounds of his villa, and they rush off together.

The Sacristan returns with the news – later to be proved false – that Napoleon Bonaparte has been defeated at the Battle of Marengo. A Te Deum (a Catholic service of thanksgiving) will be sung to celebrate the victory and, that very evening, at the Palazzo Farnese, Floria Tosca will perform a cantata (a vocal composition with instrumental accompaniment, sometimes with a chorus as well as a soloist or soloists) in the presence of the Queen of Naples. This news is interrupted by the entrance of Scarpia, the dreaded Chief of Police, and his agent Spoletta, who have tracked Angelotti to the church. A search reveals the now empty food basket and a fan bearing the Attavanti coat of arms. Scarpia suspects that Cavaradossi has helped Angelotti to escape.

Tosca returns, seeking her lover. Scarpia, who has his own designs on her, provokes her jealousy by showing her the fan and suggesting that Cavaradossi has been disturbed in a chat with the Marchesa Attavanti. When Tosca leaves, Scarpia sends Spoletta after her, knowing that she will lead him to Cavaradossi and, he hopes, Angelotti. To the accompaniment of the celebratory Te Deum, Scarpia anticipates his execution of Cavaradossi and looks forward to having Tosca to himself.

Interval

ACT II

Scarpia's apartment at the Palazzo Farnese

Scarpia, dining alone, relishes the prospect of forcing Tosca to become his. He sends her a note asking her to come to his apartment. Spoletta returns from his mission: he was unable to find Angelotti but has arrested Cavaradossi. The painter is led in and, as Scarpia begins to question him, Tosca's voice is heard singing at the concert in the apartment below. Cavaradossi refuses to



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answer Scarpia's questions and is taken off to the torture chamber just as Tosca arrives.

Scarpia tells Tosca that his men are trying to wring a confession from Cavaradossi by torture, and he orders a concealed door to be opened so that she can hear her lover's cries. Unable to bear it, she reveals Angelotti's hiding place. Scarpia orders the torture to cease, and the wounded Cavaradossi is brought in.

Tosca assures him that she kept silent while he was under torture, but when Scarpia orders Spoletta to go to the well in the painter's garden, Cavaradossi realizes that Tosca has given away Angelotti's hiding place and he curses her. Sciarrone, a police officer, rushes in with the news that Bonaparte has triumphed at Marengo after all. Cavaradossi exults and is dragged struggling from the room.

Tosca is left alone with Scarpia. She bargains with him for her lover's life, pleading in vain for mercy; finally she promises to give herself to Scarpia as the price of Cavaradossi's freedom. Scarpia seems to instruct Spoletta to arrange a mock execution, after which the lovers will be free. He writes out a pass for them (the equivalent of a passport, meaning that the lovers can leave the country safely), then, as he turns to possess Tosca, she stabs him. She searches frantically for the pass before finding it on the dead man. She leaves him and goes to find her lover.

Interval

ACT III The Castel Sant'Angelo

It is just before dawn; church bells are beginning to toll Matins (the first service of the day in the Catholic Church) and a shepherd boy is heard passing below with his flock. Cavaradossi is led in and handed over to the jailer, to whom he offers his ring as a bribe so that he can write a last farewell to Tosca. As he writes he is overwhelmed by memories of an evening spent with her.

Tosca arrives with the safe conduct and tells him that she has killed Scarpia. Cavaradossi sings of his love for her. They plan their future. Tosca tells Cavaradossi that the firing squad will use blanks and warns her lover to remain lying as if dead until she tells him that all have departed. The firing party and Spoletta arrive. Cavaradossi refuses to be blindfolded. The soldiers take aim; Cavaradossi falls.

After the soldiers have filed out Tosca hurries to rouse Cavaradossi, only to find that Scarpia had double-crossed her: the execution was real and her lover is dead. Shouts are heard: Scarpia's murder has been discovered. Spoletta and Sciarrone come to arrest Tosca, but before they can do so, with the words 'O Scarpia, we meet before God!', she leaps to her death.