

TOSCA
Music by Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa

BROADCAST DATE: July 31, 2023

SYNOPSIS

Act I

Rome. The church of Sant'Andrea della Valle.

Cesare Angelotti, an escaped prisoner, enters the church. He finds a key at the feet of the statue of the blessed virgin. He opens the door of his family's private chapel and goes inside.

The painter Mario Cavaradossi arrives to work on his portrait of Mary Magdalene. His painting is inspired by Angelotti's sister, the Marchesa Attavanti. Cavaradossi has seen her often in church. As he works, he compares the two beauties of his life: the blonde, blue-eyed saint, and the fiery Floria Tosca, the famous singer who is his lover.

Angelotti comes out of the chapel. Cavaradossi recognizes him and offers his exhausted and famished friend a lunch basket. They hear the voice of Tosca approaching. Angelotti hides again.

Tosca comes into the church. She immediately assumes that Mario was meeting another woman. Then she sees the painting. Recognizing the Marchesa's blue eyes, she accuses Mario of having an affair with her. He manages to calm her jealousy, and they plan to spend the evening together. Tosca leaves.

There is a cannon blast, which signifies an escaped prisoner. Cavaradossi offers to escort Angelotti to a hiding place at his villa, and they slip away.

The Sacristan, choristers and acolytes are preparing a te deum to celebrate the victory over Napoleon at the battle of Marengo. We meet Baron Scarpia, the chief of police. He is hot on Angelotti's trail. Scarpia orders his officers to search the chapel, and he finds a fan with the Marchesa's family crest.

Tosca enters, surprised that Mario is not at work. Scarpia shows her the fan. Tosca's jealousy gets the better of her; because the fan belongs to Angelotti's sister, Tosca assumes this proves that Cavaradossi has been unfaithful. She leaves the church in tears. Scarpia orders his men to follow her, assuming she will lead them to her lover, and so to the escaped prisoner, Angelotti.

While the choir sings the te deum, Scarpia raises his voice in jubilation: he believes the fugitives will reappear, and Tosca will run straight into his arms.

Act II

Scarpia's chambers in the palazzo Farnese.

Scarpia sends a letter to Tosca, who will be singing a cantata in the royal apartments below. The spy Spoletta tells Scarpia that he has not found Angelotti, the escaped prisoner. But he has arrested the painter Cavaradossi, and delivers him for questioning. Scarpia threatens to torture him, but Cavaradossi will not reveal where his friend is hiding.

Scarpia sends Cavaradossi to the torture chamber just as Tosca arrives. Unable to withstand hearing her lover's screams, she gives away Angelotti's hiding place... a well in Cavaradossi's garden.

Cavaradossi is dragged back in. Scarpia loudly sends Spoletta to "the well in the garden," proving that Tosca has revealed the secret. Cavaradossi is furious with her.

When they learn that Napoleon has won the victory at Marengo after all, Cavaradossi laughs defiantly, and Scarpia orders that he be taken away and executed.

Alone with Tosca, Scarpia suggests a bargain. If she gives herself to him, he will let Cavaradossi go free. Tosca appeals to heaven, saying that she has dedicated her life to art, and calls for God's help.

They learn that the escaped prisoner, Angelotti, is dead. As he was about to be captured, he swallowed poison. Knowing that her lover's life is now in her hands, Tosca agrees to Scarpia's proposition. He orders a mock execution, after which the painter will be freed.

Scarpia writes a letter of safe-passage for Tosca and Cavaradossi. When Scarpia turns to take her in his arms, Tosca kills him, takes the letter of passage, and escapes.

Act III

A platform of the Castel Sant'Angelo.

It is an hour before dawn, the hour when Cavaradossi will face the firing squad. He bribes the jailer to let him write a letter and is overcome with despair.

Tosca comes to Cavaradossi. She tells him the plan, and they dream of a life of freedom together.

Being a performer, she coaches him how to die convincingly. The firing squad approaches, and Tosca watches from a distance.

The soldiers fire, and Cavaradossi falls.

Tosca waits until everyone has left, then goes to her lover. But he does not move, and she realizes the bullets were real. Scarpia has achieved his final vengeance.

She hears men shouting that she has murdered Scarpia. Declaring that she will meet him before God, Tosca leaps to her death.