

## "Tosca" features searing drama and music

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by [Camille Bounds](#)

Opera San Jose begins its illustrious 32<sup>nd</sup> season with Puccini's most melodramatic opera "Tosca."



Pat Kirk

"Tosca" is based on Victorian Sardou's 1887 French language dramatic play La Tosca. The play starred Sarah Bernhardt, who played the lead in over 3,000 performances. Puccini became obsessed with turning the play into an opera. Librettist Luigi Illica advised Puccini against trying to turn the play into an opera because he felt it could not be adapted to a musical form and was too violent.

"Tosca" shocked and revolted many with a violent plot that included unrequited love, lust, murder, torture, deceit, political intrigue and suicide all in three acts.

"Tosca" is set in Rome in June 1800 when the control of Rome is on the brink of Napoleon's invasion. The area is under the control of ruthless Baron Scarpia, the chief of police, who eliminates those who do not please him or agree with his politics. He decides he wants Tosca, a beautiful opera singer who is involved with a painter, Cavaradossi, who is implicated with saving a friend who is on the wrong end of the Scarpia's politics. The plot thickens and gets grizzly at times, but we go to the opera for the music and arias and San Jose Opera's "Tosca" gives us a fine rendition to enjoy.

Making her debut with the San Jose Opera, soprano Olga Chernisheva shows a top quality Tosca. Her delivery of "Vissi d'art" (I Live For Art) was breathtaking.

Kirk Dougherty as Tosca's lover and doomed hero, Mario Cavaradossi, brings all his tenor talent to "Recondita armonia" (Hidden Harmony) and "E lucevan le stele" "And The Stars Shone" written in B minor and one of the most famous opera arias.

Matthew Hanscom's villainous Scarpia reaches the ultimate in a repulsive, abhorrent character. He is startling and fearsome and his super involvement of this character makes for an exceptional delivery of the role. Oh yes, his wonderful baritone sweeps over the stage with deep conviction.

Stage Director Brad Dalton keeps this grand cast moving and involved throughout the performance. Set Designer Steven Kemp and Lighting Designer Sean A. Russell bring in an upscale production.

Joseph Marcheso's baton well controls a fine full orchestra.

### San Jose Opera

Rebecca Davis (Tosca) and Christopher Bengochea (Cavaradossi) in the 2010 production of Tosca.

#### If You Go

"Tosca"

California Theatre

345 S. First St., San Jose

Through Sept. 27

Running time 2 hours 30 minutes

Tickets \$51 - \$151

Reservations and information (408) 437-4450 or [operasj.org](http://operasj.org).

It is easy to criticize singers, music and plots of opera, but when you consider the time and dedication that goes into one of these productions, when they are done well and entertain, a few notes that may be off or a missed cue really doesn't mean much. This "Tosca" was well worth the time and attention with its magnificent performance and cast.

"Tosca" is sung in Italian with English subtitles.

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