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This glorious Tosca in Ostrava is blessed by terrific singing from Šimková, Berger and Čapkovič

15/12/2024 by [Gregor Tassie](#)



Czech Republic Puccini, Tosca: Soloists, Chorus and Orchestra of the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre / Marek Šedivý (conductor). Antonín Dvořák Theatre, Ostrava, 7.12.2024. (GT)

Jiří Nekvasil's production of Tosca has proved popular among audiences in the Czech Republic for its tale of political plots, betrayal and murder together with great orchestral music and spectacular arias and duets all of which make this melodrama – once called 'a shabby little shocker' an enduring success. The National Moravian-Silesian Opera is marking the anniversary of Puccini's death with two stagings – this revival from 2021 – and a new production in December of Turandot. Puccini's Tosca first staging in Ostrava was in 1921, with another two dramatisations in the twenties – and then in 1934 – since which the company has staged new productions in almost every decade – Nekvasil's highly regarded creation is the first following the 1993 production that enjoyed a run of 66 performances.

A key to any successful performance is the three main characters, and this Tosca was blessed by three guest singers – Petra Alvarez Šimková from the National Theatre in Prague, Peter Berger and Daniel Čapkovič from Bratislava. Daniel Dvořák's setting was vividly attractive with the interior of the Sant'Andrea della Valle showing Cavaradossi's scaffolding and painting on the right, while the church gate occupied centre stage, and a locked cellar on the left. Floria Tosca tempted the artist into visiting her that night, 'Non la sospiri, la nostra casetta', and then jealously thinks the subject of his painting is of a secret lover. The scene of Tosca's query about the portrait's subject was skilfully represented with her querying the artist, and sensitively responded to by Cavaradossi in the love duet 'Qual'occhio al mondo'. Scarpia's office at the Farnese Palace in Act II, had on the left, a desk, a divan on the right, and a door to the torture chambers. The acting by Scarpia and Tosca was magnificent — with every minute movement slowly evolving to the killing of Scarpia, which was speedily executed by Tosca in her 'E avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma!'

As the curtain descended – in an innovative switch to the norm – Tosca emerged from the curtain, and like a paramour awaiting the liberation of Cavaradossi accepted applause after her second act performance. The ringing of bells at matins brought us back to reality with the Shepherd's unworldly singing of 'lo de sospiri'. The Act III staging revealed a cell on the right, while a cutout of the Castel D'Angelo on the left with stairs to the cells and the spiral stairwell beyond. In the final scene, the guards brought up their prisoner from the dungeons and after Tosca has disclosed of her deal with Scarpia, the final duet, 'Amaro sol per te' was movingly performed, and as if play acting, they shot him. Now shocked by the betrayal of Scarpia's promissory note, Tosca desperately ascended the stairwell, singing 'O Scarpia, avanti a Dio!' and the tragedy closes as her scarlet scarf fell to the floor.

Of the singers, the finest performance of the evening was that of the Slovakian baritone Daniel Čapkovič as Scarpia as the wicked police chief; his extraordinary darkly-hued tone portended evil threat in his masterly portrayal of a dastardly tyrant of seemingly great power determined to achieve his ends. His voice revealed virility in his lust for Tosca, and there was a beautiful tonal colour in his 'Ha più forte sapore' – only in one brief moment – the timbre faltered momentarily in his 'Già, mi dicon venal'. Čapkovič was matched by the remarkable soprano of Petra Alvarez Šimková in the title role – her stage presence and voice made this performance unforgettable. The characterisation was sublime with her every movement, her flashing eyes

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and facial expressions were astonishing, and she is blessed with a sublime dramatic soprano able to project the highest range together with the softest of nuances. This was especially in her 'Vissi d'arte' that showed the full range from the high A-flats at the beginning to the top B-flat at the close. The Cavaradossi of Peter Berger was magnificent in both portrayal and voice – he was a late replacement – but his performance was splendid. In the first act, the 'Qual'occhio al mondo' was performed with great sensitivity, while in the final act, 'E lucevan le stelle' was magnificent in sustaining the line and just holding back a little in the emotional close. His tenor has a heroic quality – with a tonal edge and a resolute nuance in the dramatic facets.

Of the secondary roles, the Angelotti of František Zahradníček was in great voice with his dusky, almost limitless bass underlying his terrible plight. The fine baritone of Josef Škarka's Sacristan had splendid stage presence with fine characterisation. The young Sofie Kollárová was heavenly in her coloratura soprano as the Shepherd in a beautiful contribution – unusually onstage rather than singing from the wings.

Jiří Nekvasil's staging was old-style with nothing controversial – although in the third act – we saw the backdrops from the first two acts at the rear of the stage, with just a model of the Castel Sant'Angelo as the execution spot for Cavaradossi. It seemed somewhat underwhelming. A coup de théâtre at the close of Act I was the church procession in the 'Te Deum' as the priests, monks and nuns entered the amphitheatre – and occupied the stage plus the sides of it – creating a stirringly emotive culmination. This was an innovative device by choreographer Jana Tomsová and brought the audience closer to the action and increased the sense of spectacle.

The costumes by Marta Roszkopfová were attractive, nineteenth-century black costumes for Scarpia and Tosca in Act II, and in the first two acts, Tosca was attired in pink, while the secondary singers were in greys and blacks for the police and priests. The sets by Daniel Dvořák were typical of many Tosca stagings and thankfully without any brash schemes championed occasionally by some European set directors. The dramaturgy by Juraj Bajus was masterly and brought out all the essential characteristics of what audiences want and expect from performances of this melodrama.

Playing it safe with Puccini operas is a thing of wisdom as audiences always know what to expect from them. This Tosca is a triumphant success for the Ostrava company – with a realistic production embellished by great singing and backed up by fine orchestral playing under the direction of Marek Šedivý.

Gregor Tassie

Production:

Stage director – Jiří Nekvasil

Set director – Daniel Dvořák

Costumes – Marta Roszkopfová

Choreography – Jana Tomsová

Chorus master – Jurij Galatenko

Dramaturgy – Juraj Bajus

Cast:

Tosca – Petra Alvarez Šimková

Cavaradossi – Peter Berger

Baron Scarpia – Daniel Čapkovič

Angelotti – František Zahradníček

Sacristan – Josef Škarka

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Spoletta – Václav Čížek

Sciarrone – Roman Vlkovič

Jailer – Erik Ondruš

Shepherd – Sofie Kollárová

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