

Rimrock Opera

presents



Special Student Performance April 28, Thursday 9 – Noon

Public Performances April 30 & May 1, 2011 Alberta Bair Theater, Billings, Montana

Rimrock Opera History

Until the founding of the Rimrock Opera in 1999, opera was a scarce commodity in Billings. Occasional opera performances by touring groups attracted large audiences even though the accompaniment was usually provided by piano rather than orchestra. One notable exception was the 1964 Territorial Celebration tour of Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West*, produced by the University of Montana and presented in a dozen sites throughout the state including Billings' Fox Theater. Included in the tour cast were Lee Mathews (who subsequently was the stage director for the 1989 premiere of *Pamelia* at the Alberta Bair Theater) and Edward Harris (who helped in starting the Rimrock Opera).

In the 1970s, the presence of guest artist Julian Patrick at Rocky Mountain College made it possible for RMC's Don Pihlaja to produce *The Old Maid and the Thief* and *Down in the Valley*.

In a burst of venturesome programming, Billings Symphony Orchestra conductor George Perkins directed a Billings production of *The Magic Flute* in 1973. (Included in the local cast in his first operatic experience was Douglas Nagel as Papageno.) Perkins later directed a lavish local production of *The Mikado* which featured sets designed by famed artist Hall Diteman.

The opera *Pamelia* premiered at the Alberta Bair Theater in 1989. *Pamelia* combined local and professional talents and was made possible largely through the fund-raising work of Billings volunteer Ellen Alweis. The Western Opera Company presented its touring production of *Die Fledermaus* in October, 1993. The Billings Symphony and Chorale featured local talent in a 1995 production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. All other musical theater productions (1950s - 1990s) by schools and community theatre were lighter "Broadway" type productions featuring piano or reduced instrumentation accompaniment.

With the assistance of local attorney Larry Tompkins, a nonprofit corporate entity called the Billings Opera Guild was formed, a necessary step before raising any funds. Unfortunately, the constituency of our organization was frequently changing, causing a lack of organizational infrastructure and a loss of focus on the Billings Opera Guild goals.

Finally some momentum and credibility were obtained when the world-famous baritone Pablo Elvira gave his support. He had been instrumental in forming the Intermountain Opera Company in Bozeman 25 years earlier. With his network of friends and contacts in the international opera community, Elvira was able to attract world-class talent to perform for Montana audiences.

Elvira met with the members of the Billings Opera Guild. With Elvira's encouragement, new members were added to the organization, and advice on fund-raising was provided.

Later, Mr. Elvira offered his talents to star in the premiere Rimrock Opera's *Barber of Seville*. Through his experience and connections Rimrock Opera obtained the rental of orchestral parts, the services of Roberto Stivanello to provide costumes and sets, and Giampaolo Bracali to be the musical conductor. Support was also provided by the "Pamelia Fund,"--assets remaining from a 1989 Centennial project.

Everything came together by opening night, November 19, 1999. Everyone was surprised and delighted by the success of the inaugural show. After the matinee on November 21, the board met at John Baber's home to discuss with cast member Douglas Nagel his willingness and availability to serve as Rimrock Opera's first Artistic Director. He accepted and has been Rimrock Opera's Artistic Director ever since.

Just for the Record:

1999 – The Barber of Seville
2000 – Madama Butterfly
2001 – The Merry Widow
2002 – Tosca
2002 – Carmen
2003 – The Magic Flute
2003 – Don Giovanni
2004 – Hansel & Gretel
2004 – Nosferatu *WORLD PREMIERE*
2005 – La Bohème
2005 – La Traviata
2006 – Die Fledermaus
2006 – Madama Butterfly
2007 – Così fan tutte
2007 – Girl of the Golden West
2008 – The Elixir of Love
2009 – Carmen & The Barber of Seville
2010 – La Bohème & The Merry Widow
2011 – Tosca & Rigoletto

A Short History of Opera

The word *opera* is the plural form of the Latin word *opus*, which translates quite literally as *work*. The use of the plural form alludes to the plurality of art forms that combine to create an operatic performance. Today we accept the word *opera* as a reference to a theatrically based musical art form in which the drama is propelled by the sung declamation of text accompanied by a full symphony orchestra.

Opera as an art form can claim its origin with the inclusion of incidental music that was performed during the tragedies and comedies popular during ancient Greek times. The tradition of including music as an integral part of theatrical activities expanded in Roman times and continued throughout the Middle Ages. Surviving examples of liturgical dramas and vernacular plays from Medieval times show the use of music as an “insignificant” part of the action as do the vast mystery and morality plays of the 15th and 16th centuries. Traditional view holds that the first completely sung musical drama (or opera) developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570s by an informal academy known as the *Camerata* which led to the musical setting of Rinuccini’s drama, *Dafne*, by composer, Jacopo Peri in 1597.

The work of such early Italian masters as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi led to the development of a through-composed musical entertainment comprised of *recitative* sections (*secco* and *accompagnato*) which revealed the plot of the drama; followed by *da capo arias* which provided the soloist an opportunity to develop the emotions of the character. The function of the *chorus* in these early works mirrored that of the character of the same name found in

Greek drama. The new “form” was greeted favorably by the public and quickly became a popular entertainment.



The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the

singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities.

There are five major voice types: *Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, and Bass* (defined under OPERA TERMS).

History

In the early 1800s in Europe, one of the main sources of entertainment was theatre, and going out to the theatre often involved watching a play by one of the most popular dramatists of the time, Victorien Sardou. In fact, the French playwright Sardou, was so well known and loved that several of his works were converted to operas; at the time no less than 12 operas were created from Sardou’s popular dramas. Puccini’s *Tosca*, based on the play entitled *La Tosca*, was one of these.

Creating Tosca

Creating *Tosca* was no easy task: In 1889 Puccini first saw Sardou’s *La Tosca* and immediately contacted his editor, Giulio Ricordi, to ask to buy the rights to the play. When it was finally purchased in 1893, it was given to a Luigi Illaca to develop the libretto and to a young composer by the name of Baron Alberto Franchetti to write the musical score. The work went through several stages of edits, until it seemed clear to Ricordi and Illaca that Franchetti may not have been the best match for the project; by the summer of 1895 Franchetti left the project, and after some convincing, Puccini took over. Near the same time, Illaca joined forces with Giacomo Giacosa to complete the libretto. The opera was completed in 1899, and *Tosca* was premiered in Rome on January 14, 1900 – the city within which the opera itself is set.

Giacomo Puccini

Giacomo Puccini (pronounced jah-kaw-maw poo-chee-nee) was born into a musical family in 1858 in the Italian town of Lucca. Puccini started to study music at a young age, taking lessons with his uncle, playing organ and taking the role of choir master in church, then attending the Milan Conservatory as a young adult. His love for opera first began when he saw Verdi’s *Aida* – a performance he allegedly walked about 30kms to watch. Today, Puccini is considered one of the greatest Italian composers of all time, having created some of the most beautiful and dramatic operas that are now part of many opera

company's standard repertoire. His best known works include: *La Bohème*, *Turandot*, *Madame Butterfly*, and, of course, *Tosca*. Puccini died in 1924 due to complications from surgery in his battle with throat cancer.

The Origin of Tosca

Victorien Sardou was a renowned French dramatist as well as librettist: he was born in Paris in 1831, and died in 1908. In many of Sardou's plays, his style followed in the footsteps of Scribe and Beaumarchais: his works were mostly satirical comedies that scorned contemporary social and political issues of his day.

Sardou was also an astute and meticulous amateur historian, writing passionate and tragic melodramas that were usually set against a background of war or rebellion. His dramatic stage works inspired some 25 operas.

Sardou became a champion of late nineteenth-century literary naturalism, or Realism. Through this form he wrote the stage play *La Tosca* for the then reigning diva, or goddess of the theatrical stage, Sarah Bernhardt - then age 45. His play was a supreme theatrical and dramatic success, which had over 3000 performances in France alone. Sardou's *La Tosca* portrayed the genre of realism to the core; it was a brutal and savage melodrama saturated with sadism, cruelty, and murder.

MEET THE COMPOSER: GIACOMO PUCCINI

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) was the heir to Italy's cherished opera icon, Giuseppe Verdi: he became the last champion of the great Italian Romantic opera tradition, in which lyricism, melody, and the vocal arts dominated the art form.

Puccini came from a family of musicians who for generations had been church organists and composers in his native Lucca, Italy, a part of the Tuscany region. His operatic epiphany occurred when he heard a performance of Verdi's *Aïda*: at that moment the 18 year old, budding composer became inspired toward a future in opera. With aid from Queen Margherita of Italy that was supplemented by additional funds from a great uncle, he progressed to the Milan Conservatory, where he eventually studied under Amilcare Ponchielli, a renowned musician, teacher, and composer.

In Milan, Ponchielli became his mentor, astutely recognizing his extraordinarily rich orchestral and symphonic imagination, and his remarkable harmonic and melodic inventiveness, resources that would become the hallmarks and signature characteristics of Puccini's mature compositional style.

Puccini's early experiences served to elevate his acute sense of drama, which eventually became engraved in his operatic works. He was fortunate to have been exposed to a wide range of dramatic plays that were presented in his hometown by distinguished touring companies: works by Vittorio Alfieri, Carlo Goldoni, the French works of Alexandre Dumas', father and son, as well as those of the extremely popular Victorien Sardou.

In 1884, at the age of 26, Puccini competed in the publisher Sonzogno's one-act opera contest with his lyric stage work, *Le Villi*, "The Witches," a phantasmagoric romantic tale about abandoned young women who die of lovesickness; musically and dramatically, *Le Villi* remains quite a distance from the poignant sentimentalism which later became Puccini's trademark. *Le Villi* lost the contest, but La Scala

agreed to produce the opera for its following season. But more significantly to Puccini's future career, Giulio Ricordi, the influential publisher, recognized the young composer's talent to write musical drama, and lured him from his competitor, Sonzogno.

Puccini became Ricordi's favorite composer and subsequently Ricordi commissioned Puccini to write a second opera, *Edgar*. For Puccini's librettos over the next decade, Ricordi secured for him the illustrious team of the scenarist, Luigi Illica, and the poet, playwright, and versifier, Giuseppe Giacosa. The first fruit of their collaboration became *La Bohème*.

After *La Bohème*, Puccini proceeded to transform Victorien Sardou's play, *La Tosca*, into a sensational, powerful, and thrilling musical action drama, improving on his literary source and providing immortality to its dramatist.

OPERA TERMS

The word 'opera' is Italian, derived from the plural of the Latin opus, meaning 'work.' Opera, in Italian is called opera lirica, or lyric work. 'Lyric' is defined as 'appropriate song,' so opera lirica is a work of theatre that is set to song. Opera combines the best of all worlds: singing, orchestra, drama, dance, sets, costumes, lighting and special effects. All of these characteristics combine to make opera one of the most powerful art forms. Opera is just as entertaining now as it was when it was first created. If you like a good story, you'll like opera. Here are a few things to help you figure it all out.

Libretto: Italian for "little book;" the words of an opera written by a librettist.

Aria: Italian for an air or song; the big number where the singer expresses feelings and shows off the voice.

Recitative: Speech-singing where the singer chants the words in rhythm of free speech. Used to further the plot or set up an aria. It could be considered a forerunner of rap music.

Duet: An aria built for two. Singers express feelings to each other or the audience. There are several of these in *Tosca* as Mario and Floria sing together.

Ensemble: Principal singers singing mostly together, expressing similar or different opinions and emotions.

Soprano: The voice has a high range of notes. Voice quality can be dramatic or lyric. For example, Floria Tosca in *Tosca*.

Mezzo-Soprano: Mezzo-Sopranos have the middle range of the female voice.

Tenor: The highest range in the male voice. For example, the role Mario Cavaradossi in *Tosca*.

Baritone: The middle range of the male voice. For example, the role of Scarpia in *Tosca*.

Bass: The lowest of the male voices. For example; the role of the Sacristan in *Tosca*.

Supertitles: English text projected above the stage. The text is generally paraphrased wording of what's being said on stage.

Chorus: A group of community-based singers, who provide support to the principal singers, set the scene and create the mood for an opera. The chorus includes all voice categories.

Verismo: which in Italian means “real”, is an operatic movement that originated in the 19th century in Italy, and this is the style in which Puccini worked.

Pulling it Together

It takes a lot of people to produce an opera! An opera production not only involves soloists, chorus and orchestra, but many other people involved in planning, working behind the scenes, in the auditorium and marketing the performance. Here are some of the jobs with brief descriptions.

Producer: The person who coordinates all parts of the production, including hiring and contracting all artists, technical crew and arranging for sets, costumes and supertitles

Conductor: Directs all music rehearsals; conducts performances

Chorus Master: Prepares the adult chorus for performance

Chorus: Mainly living in Billings - auditioned every year

ROCK: Rimrock Opera Chorus for Kids members participate in the performance

ROCK Director: The person who teaches the kids of ROCK their music for *Tosca*

Rehearsal Pianist: Plays for all musical and staging rehearsals

Stage Director: Moves all performers on stage; works with characterization

Production Manager: In charge of all aspects of technical production

Head Make-Up Artist: Responsible for applying make up for all performers

Costume Designer: Design, and make costumes for all performers

Costume Coordinator: Person who alters and fits the rented costumes to each performer

Dressers: Fit and alter costumes for performers

Stage Manager: In charge of rehearsal operations for cast and crew; writes down all on stage movement and calls cues for cast and crew during the performance

Assistant Stage Manger: Assists stage manager with specific responsibilities; attends all rehearsals

Set Designer: Draws a design for the set, scenery and props

Stage Crew: Moves scenery and stage props

Lighting Designer: Devises a lighting plan, oversees hanging of all light instruments

Title Operator: Operates computer for Supertitles



Property Master: Works with set designer/director on props; keeps them safe

Front of House Manager: In charge of auditorium seating, lobby, ushers

Web Designer: Design the opera web site

Opera Program Director: Requires layout designers, writers etc.

Plot Overview

In 1800, the city of Rome was a virtual police state. The ruling Bourbon monarchy was threatened by agitators advocating political and social reform: the Republicans, inspired to freedom and democracy by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and Napoleon, opposed the Royalists who advocated the continuation of the existing monarchy.

Mario Cavaradossi, a painter and ardent Republican sympathizer, aids an escaped fugitive, Cesare Angelotti, imprisoned because of his Republican sympathies. Baron Scarpia, the Roman chief of police, suspects Cavaradossi's complicity in concealing Angelotti and arrests him. Cavaradossi is in love with the renowned singer, Floria Tosca: Scarpia also desires Tosca. Scarpia tortures Cavaradossi in the presence of Tosca, and she then discloses Angelotti's whereabouts. Afterwards, Scarpia condemns Cavaradossi to execution.

To save her lover, Tosca agrees to submit to the lustful Scarpia in exchange for their safe passage from Rome. Scarpia orders a mock execution for Cavaradossi, after which Tosca murders Scarpia.

Cavaradossi is killed when real bullets are fired at his execution. Scarpia's police arrive to arrest Tosca, but she escapes them, and leaps over the parapet to her death.

Principal Characters in the Opera

Floria Tosca, <i>a celebrated singer</i>	Soprano
Mario Cavaradossi, <i>a painter</i>	Tenor
Scarpia, <i>Roman police chief</i>	Bass-baritone or Dramatic Baritone
Cesare Angelotti, <i>a former Roman Consul</i>	Bass
A Sacristan	Bass
Spoletta, <i>a police agent</i>	Tenor
Sciarrone, <i>a police agent</i>	Baritone
Jailer	Bass
Shepherd Boy	Boy Soprano
Chorus of Adults and Children: Soldiers, police agents, noblemen and women, townsfolk, artisans, cardinal, judge, scribe, officers, executioner, altar boys, children	

Tosca Synopsis

Set in Rome, in the year 1800.

Act I

Cesare Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner, seeks refuge at the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle where his friend, a painter, and a political sympathizer, Mario Cavaradossi is working. Entering the church, he immediately finds the key to the chapel and enters and hides himself. Almost at the same moment, the Sacristan returns from cleaning paint brushes. He enters into dialogue with Cavaradossi who is working on a painting of Mary Magdalene; the Sacristan immediately recognizes the woman in the painting as a young woman that was in the church praying devoutly earlier that week. The Sacristan is mortified by this and claims it a sacrilege. Cavaradossi, seemingly unmoved by the Sacristan's objections, goes on to compare his lover's beauty to that of the woman in his painting.

The Sacristan eventually departs and leaves Cavaradossi to his work. Once he's gone, Angelotti reveals himself to Cavaradossi. Cavaradossi agrees to provide him refuge. When he hears his lover Floria Tosca approaching he tells Angelotti to hide in the chapel once more. Tosca, a famous singer has come to invite Cavaradossi to meet her that evening. But, Tosca is a very jealous woman, and is first angry when she enters - having sworn she heard Cavaradossi whispering to someone - then again when she sees the painting Cavaradossi is working on and recognizes Mary Magdalene as the blue-eyed Marchese Attavanti. Cavaradossi assures her not to worry, and urges her to leave him to his work.

Once Tosca departs Cavaradossi calls Angelotti from the chapel once more. Cavaradossi then discovers Angelotti's sister is the Marchese Attavanti and that when she came to the church earlier she had left him a basket of women's clothes under the chapel alter, for Angelotti to use to disguise himself. Just then the canon sounds outside, and Cavaradossi understands this to mean that they have discovered Angelotti's escape. The two men quickly flee to Cavaradossi's villa to hide Angelotti.

The Sacristan and Scarpia enter the church to find Cavaradossi gone. However, one piece of evidence has been left behind: a fan that Angelotti dropped, bearing Marchese Attavanti's crest. They conclude that Angelotti has been there and that Cavaradossi is an accomplice in his escape. Tosca returns to the church to find that Cavaradossi is no longer there; instead, she finds Scarpia, who immediately lets Tosca see the fan they've discovered. Once again, as per Scarpia's plan, Tosca spirals into a jealous rage. Tosca departs for the villa to confront Cavaradossi, and Scarpia orders that she be followed. Scarpia sings a solo in which he reveals his plan to kill Cavaradossi and have Tosca.

Act II

The setting is Farnese Palace, and a celebration is in the midst in a lower story of the palace to celebrate a reported victory against Napoleon Bonaparte's army. The celebrations have begun with dancing, while everyone awaits Tosca's arrival – she will be singing. Scarpia asks that a note be given to Tosca upon her arrival. Spoletta returns from having followed Tosca, and searched the villa home. He indicates that, although they weren't able to find Angelotti, they have captured Cavaradossi. Cavaradossi is then brought in by guards; he refuses to answer inquiries about Angelotti's whereabouts. Soon Tosca comes in, runs toward Cavaradossi and embraces him.

Cavaradossi is then taken to another room, which neither he nor Tosca realize is a torture chamber. Scarpia begins to interrogate Tosca, realizing that she must have gone to the villa only to find Cavaradossi

plotting to conceal Angelotti - their warm embrace confirms these suspicions. As Scarpia speaks to Tosca, Cavaradossi's tortured cries reach their room. Tosca, unable to listen to her lover suffer any longer, discloses Angelotti's hiding place. Outside the palace, at that moment they also discover that the reverse of Italy's celebrations has occurred - Bonaparte's army has claimed victory.

Cavaradossi is then taken away to be executed. When Tosca asks what she can do to save her beloved Cavaradossi, Scarpia explains that she must give her love to Scarpia in exchange for her lover's life. With shame Tosca agrees to the deal. As evidence to Tosca that he will follow through on his end of the bargain, Scarpia orders his guards to fake Cavaradossi's assassination – “just like with Palmieri.” Tosca then asks for a safe-conduct so she and Cavaradossi can flee the province afterward, which Scarpia agrees to sign. Once Scarpia signs the safe-conduct, Tosca kills him.

Act III

Cavaradossi is informed by the jailer that he has an hour before his execution. He asks the jailer if he can have a pen and paper to write a final farewell to his love, but then is so overcome by emotion.

Then, surprisingly, Tosca arrives at the jail, shows him the safe-conduct, and tells him that she has killed Scarpia. She explains to Cavaradossi that they are now free – but that Cavaradossi must partake in a mock execution first. Tosca tells him that once they have fired the fake shots he will need to hold still and not move. They laugh about the trick they will play.

Cavaradossi is then brought to the firing wall, and shot; as Tosca instructed, he falls naturally, and does not move. Watching on, Tosca urges him not to move yet. Finally, once the soldiers are out of sight, Tosca calls for Cavaradossi to stand up. When he doesn't move, she quickly realizes that Scarpia had ordered a real execution “just like with Palmieri”, and that even from his grave he has had his revenge. In anguish, she jumps to her death...

Quiz yourself!

1. This female character is the object of Cavaradossi's affection.
 - a. Answer - Who is Floria Tosca?
2. This sinister character will do anything he can to destroy Cavaradossi.
 - a. Answer - Who is Scarpia?
3. This political prisoner escapes from prison and flees to the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle for refuge.
 - a. Answer- Who is Angelotti?
4. In the last act, this character declares that he has “never loved life more.”
 - a. Answer - Who is the Cavaradossi?
5. The blue-eyed woman Cavaradossi uses as a model for his painting of Mary Magdalene.
 - a. Answer – Who is Marchese Attavanti?
6. The composer completed the opera for *Tosca* in which year?
 - a. Answer - What is 1899?
7. Puccini also composed other well-known operas. Name one.
 - a. Answer - What is *Madame Butterfly*, *Turandot*, or *La Bohème*?
8. These two people wrote the libretto for Puccini's *Tosca*.
 - a. Answer - Who are Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa?

9. This is the style Puccini composed in, which comes from the Italian word “real”.
 - a. Answer - What is Verismo?
10. The opera Tosca was based on the work of this French popular playwright of the time.
 - a. Answer - Who is Victorien Sardou?
11. The city where this opera is set.
 - a. Answer - What is Rome?
12. The number of acts in this opera.
 - a. Answer- What is three?
13. They are celebrating at Farnese Palace because they believe they have been victorious against this army.
 - a. Answer - What is Napoleon Bonaparte’s army?
14. The sacristan and Scarpia find this in the church, and conclude that Cavaradossi is hiding Angelotti.
 - a. Answer- What is a woman’s fan with Marchese Attavanti’s crest on it?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

History

1. The action in Tosca takes place in many famous locations in Rome. Research the 1) Date of construction, 2) Purpose of structure, 3) Current condition, 4) Unique aspects of the structure for the Colosseum, Pantheon, the Forum, the Spanish Steps, the Catacombs and the Baths.
2. The opera takes place during 1800, which was a time of major political unrest in Italy. There was also major political unrest during the 1900’s in Italy. Discuss the political changes in Italy during the 1900’s and rise and fall of fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini.

Geography

3. The Roman Empire was once the most powerful force in the world. Using a current world map, research and list which countries (or parts of countries) were once a part of the Roman Empire.

Government

4. Ancient Rome was the birthplace of many important political ideas. What were some of the major political ideas developed in ancient Rome? Are any of these ideas still used today?

Science

5. The Ancient Romans were scientifically a very advanced society. What were some of their most important contributions to science? Do we still use some of their discoveries?

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