



A Tragedy Of Lost Love

Jealousy, passion and the intense beauty of Rome set the scene for Puccini's Tosca, a tragedy of lost love.

Probably the most Roman of all operas ever to be written, based on jealousy, obsession and lost love, is "Tosca", a passionate tragedy with three evocative and outstanding monuments of the Eternal City as backdrops. This Puccini opera is famous for its renowned Roma stage sets, where the main characters' tragedies develop in an intimate manner: the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle, setting for the first act, a hall in Palazzo Farnese, where the horror of the second act takes place and lastly, the bastions of Castel Sant'Angelo, where the indomitable Tosca tragically takes her life. Maestro Puccini could have not have chosen more suitable and suggestive settings for the three parts of this world famous melodrama, and even though the beautiful church of Sant'Andrea della Valle is the least famous, it is worth a visit, not only to relive the magical atmosphere of the first act, but also for its invaluable artistic treasures. In fact, some details of the church are not shown in the scene, such as its majestic façade, its big dome and its vast interior space, decorated with frescoes and adorned with imposing statues. This church was created by the greatest artists of the first half of the 17th century, and it is a true melting pot of masterpieces. It is difficult to believe that during Tosca's time this area was a stretch of clear water surrounded by woods, and is now an area with chaotic traffic. However, once inside, it is easy to plunge into the spellbinding atmosphere and hear the notes of immortal arias coming from a distance. Without undermining its beauty and great intrinsic value as a monument and masterpiece, the church of Sant'Andrea is by now engulfed in the opera's melodramatic atmosphere. One can just imagine the first act underway, a forewarning of the tragedy yet to take place, among the niches, chapels, statues and frescoes.

The second act opens on the second floor of a beautiful Roman palace, in the room of Sciarpa, the chief inspector that is feared and hated by many, especially Tosca, who has been subject to his intrusive and unpleasant courtship for a long time. It is in the palace's beautiful hall that Sciarpa promises Tosca to save the life of her beloved in exchange for a night of love. Once this deceptive plan is settled, Sciarpa hurls himself onto Tosca who stabs him to death with a knife and escapes. All these events occur in a setting which is considered to be one of the most beautiful palaces in Rome, namely Palazzo Farnese, a 15th century building belonging to the Agustinian friars. It is rather difficult to believe that stones from the ruins of the Colosseum and the Theatre of Marcellus were used for the façade.

The third act sets the scene for the tragedy about to take place: Cavaradossi, the beloved of Tosca, is waiting to be shot on the platform of Castel Sant'Angelo, and Tosca is present, convinced that the situation is just a fake, as Sciarpa had promised her before she killed him. However is not long before Tosca realises of the real execution and not a false one. The guards, who by now have found about the chief inspector's assassination, suddenly arrive. Tosca desperately climbs onto the parapet of the castle's high terrace from where, waiting to run away with her beloved towards freedom, she had witnessed his unexpected execution, and throws herself into the emptiness below. The fate of the two lovers may seem even more unfair, tragic and incredibly sad because it takes place in such a beautiful and majestic setting: the Castel Sant'Angelo, one of the many papal sites and surely the most famous for its location and grandeur.

This magnificent site today houses the National Museum of Castel Sant'Angelo, which is made up of an interesting collection of ancient weapons and the sumptuous papal apartments adorned with stuccoes, friezes, tapestries and pottery, while the aforementioned terraces, apart from recalling Puccini's famous aria, offer one of the most beautiful views of Rome's historic centre.