

National Centre Performing Arts Co- production with Opera Bergen
of Giacomo Puccini's 'TOSCA'
in September 2010.

The genre of opera is one of the most time honoured traditions in western classical music. It is the ultimate entertainment. Opera houses throughout the west represent the crown jewel of culture in which ever city they exist – creating lavish and sometimes remarkably new versions of old masterworks. All audiences enjoy the grand spectacle, the opulence of the staging, the massed forces of voice and instruments, the glorious music of venerated composers and all of it performed to the musical backdrop of a full symphony orchestra.

The National Centre Performing Arts in Mumbai recently joined the list of world opera venues – by co producing an international standard opera in 2008. The performance of Puccini's "MADAMA BUTTERFLY" in February 2008, brought much attention to the venue and its capabilities – technically and artistically. Many international observers were unaware that Mumbai had a fully functioning opera house and could co produce to a very high artistic level. Following on this success, in September 2010, the NCPA and its resident orchestra the Symphony Orchestra of India will once again venture into this marvelous world of opera production, with Puccini's masterpiece 'TOSCA'.

TOSCA is an opera that has it all. For people who return to it in full knowledge – or for those who will see it for the first time, it is a story set with intrigue, jealousy, love, hate, freedom, liberty, nationalism, and the monumental fight between good and evil. Sheer entertainment for everyone - on a grand scale.

SYNOPSIS:

This adaptation of Victorien Sardou's play is set in Rome – and takes place over the course of two days in June 1800 - in recognizable buildings which still stand to this day. The armies of Napoleon having conquered Italy in 1798 withdrew, leaving Rome in the hands of the Kingdom of Naples. Rome is subjugated to the evil chief of police Baron Scarpia, a personal henchman of queen Caroline of Naples. Scarpia undertakes a 'round up' of all dissidents and traitors sympathetic to the French cause, creating a malevolent fear in the hearts of the citizenry and feigned allegiance to Italian Nobility. In 1800 Napoleon returns to Italy and meets the forces of the British and Austrians at Marengo. The battle is almost lost, but then in the final hours a turn in the tide of events gives Napoleon a decisive victory. We join the opera in the first act in a church, San Andrea della Valle, where a political prisoner Angelotti (former consul of the Roman Republic set up by the French) has just escaped and seeks refuge. Also in this church, painting a fresco, is the painter Cavaradossi who is a sympathizer. He sings of his undying love for Floria Tosca the famous singer and heroine of the opera. Tosca arrives and is moved to a little jealousy as the face in the picture painted by Cavaradossi is not hers. He consoles her and they plan a rendezvous at the Palazzo Farnese where she is to sing a concert. The first courier travelling with erroneous news announces Napoleons defeat in the north and there is a sense of jubilation in the church which is broken by the arrival of Scarpia and his equally odious assistant Spoletto, intent on hunting his prisoners to the very end. He plays on Tosca's obvious jealousies and the double intrigue of his love for

her is taken up. The act ends with the famous Te Deum of praise with a full church of towns people and religious. Scarpia's plans will deliver Cavaradossi and Angelotti to the scaffold and Tosca into his arms, and with these evil thoughts he kneels in prayer with the congregation.

Act II is set in the Palazzo Farnese, Scarpia's headquarters. Spoletta his deputy has been unsuccessful in finding Angelotti but has instead captured Cavaradossi, who refuses to divulge the location of his compatriot and is mercilessly tortured. Scarpia now turns to Tosca questioning her. She retains her poise but when she hears Cavaradossi's screams from the adjoining torture room, she relents, giving away Angelotti's hideout. Cavaradossi is brought back in, much worse for wear, and is defiant in his manner, even when he realizes that Tosca has given up Angelotti. At this crucial moment, the second courier arrives announcing Napoleon's decisive victory at Marengo and Cavaradossi sings loudly of victory and liberty and is subsequently sentenced to 'death by firing squad' the following morning.

Tosca is now left with Scarpia and appealing to his good senses begs for Cavaradossi's life – giving her own to Scarpia, which makes Scarpia think of yet another evil plan. He suggests that since the execution order has been given it cannot be reversed, but that he will arrange a secret plan – done before with another prisoner - for the firing squad to fire blanks. He persuades Tosca that this plan will work and Tosca suitably relieved, stabs Scarpia with a fruit knife that's lying on the table. Arranging his body carefully with candles she slips out of the room and prepares to confront the execution scene the following morning.

Act III the scene is set at Castel Sant'Angelo the Papal prison in Rome. A shepherd boy is heard passing by, and Cavaradossi has spent the night looking at the stars convinced of his death and the loss of Tosca. Tosca arrives to show him the safe conduct she has secured from Scarpia's office and explains the plan for the mock execution – and the two lovers sing of their new found liberty and how they will survive the events of the morning. The firing squad are led in and Cavaradossi is positioned. The shots ring out and Cavaradossi falls convincingly to the ground. Tosca waits for the guards to leave, commenting on Cavaradossi's great acting. Approaching closer – to her horror she finds real blood and death, and the revealing of Scarpia's evil plan to follow through with a fatal execution. The guards come rushing in having found the body of the murdered Chief of Police and make to arrest Tosca, but she in a grand flourish screams that she will meet Scarpia before God and throws herself over the battlements to her death.

This glorious opera has given much joy and satisfaction to not only its audiences but to its performers. The intrigue of modern politics and the everyday passions of love, hate, jealousy and betrayal make it a story for the ages. Our forthcoming production is with the internationally renowned Opera Bergen under the baton of director Anne Randine Overby. *(insert other cast members here)* Work has been underway for some time to ensure a successful venture with details of sets, a roster of the finest international artists and matters of technical production. The NCPA is once more in opera mode.

These productions are difficult to mount, even for the most seasoned of opera companies. It requires dedication, perseverance and an unflagging commitment to artistic integrity. The NCPA will bring this production to Mumbaikers in September 2010 – but needs the help and support of enlightened partners

who realize that India, Mumbai and the NCPA are breaking new ground on the international scene of music production and that we too can be proud of our opera traditions in our very own opera house. The opera will be accompanied by the Symphony Orchestra of India, the country's first professional orchestra, who regularly perform to an international standard and have given Mumbai a rich series of classical concerts since its inception in 2006. As a result of recent concerts, the orchestra was invited to perform in a prestigious festival in Moscow this year to celebrate Russia Day. As we go from strength to strength don't miss the great opportunity to see, support and partner in these groundbreaking international achievements for India.