Èitajte o glazbi i svim njezinim pojavnostima iz pera naših ponajboljih pisaca u esejima i èlancima koje možete èitati na stranicama našeg èasopisa WAM.

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Marija Barbieri

MILKA TRNINA - GREAT TOSCA

Čitajte o glazbi i svim njezinim pojavnostima iz pera naših ponajboljih pisaca u esejima i člancima koje možete čitati na stranicama našeg časopisa WAM.

"Tosca" is a five-act drama written by famous French dramatist Victorien Sardou (1831-1908). When Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) took interest in her, he was still not at the peak of his career, although he had already created "Manon Lescaut" and "La Boheme". As he desired to join verism completely, he naturally reached for the drama of powerful passion. He watched it twice. He was particularly impressed by the performance in Florence in 1895, with famous French tragedian Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) in the leading role. Publisher Giulio Ricordi (1840-1912) purchased the copyright for the libretto, and Luigi Illica (1857-1919) and Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906), faithful associates of Puccini, started to work on it. Puccini found it encouraging that the drama appealed to the great Verdi, so he did his utmost to convince Alberto Franchetti (1860-1942), who was initially the one to compose the opera after this drama, to give this up, which he eventually did.

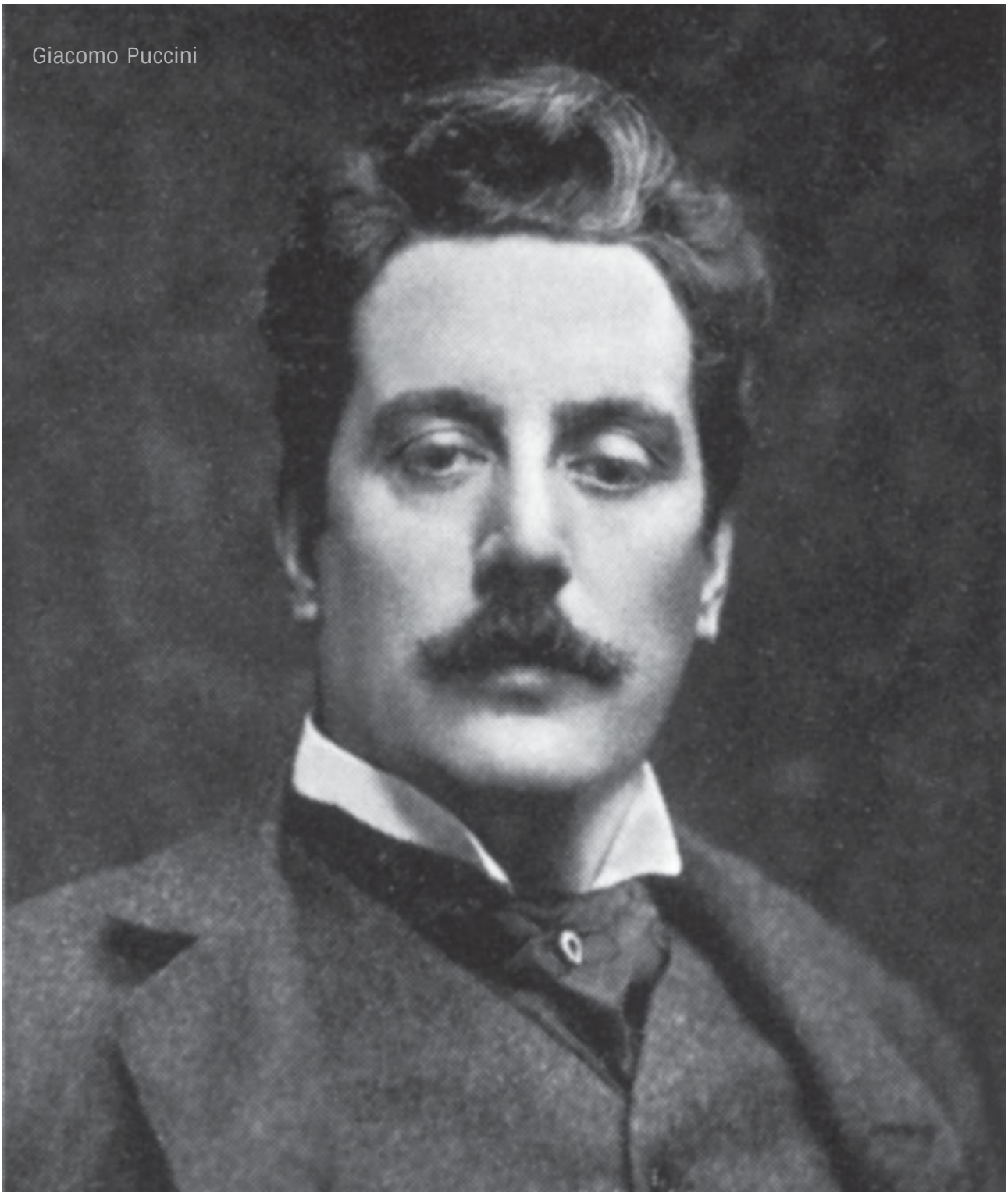
Sardou's "Tosca" was an excellent melodrama, almost flawless, with the rule of the three unities: place, time, and action (it takes place in Rome on a single day, 17th June 1800), firm structure and very effective. Illica adjusted it according to the requirements of the operatic scene, reduced it from five to three acts and retained three out of twenty-three characters. Everyone was delighted, only Giacosa complained, saying: *" 'La Boheme' was poetry without a plot. 'Tosca' is a plot without poetry".* And he was not at all that far from the truth! Still, Puccini was much too great an artist and he introduced beautiful lyrical moments into this mixture of sex, religion, art, love, lust and sadism, such as the famous Tosca's aria "Vissi d'arte", Cavaradossi's premortal meditation "E lucevan le stelle", for which he wrote a verse himself, and his arioso in the final duet "O dolci mani". Gina Cigna (1990-2001), one of the latter interpreters of Tosca, who studied the role with its first interpreter Hariclea Darclee (1860-1939), remembers how Darclee told her that it was she who talked Puccini into writing the aria of Tosca.

Famous as a fine master of detail and creator of atmosphere and not only as an excellent melodist, Puccini left for Rome to sense the morning bells of the numerous belfries. He listened to shepherd songs with folklore atmosphere, he made an effort to understand the Te Deum ceremony. He began composing in June 1989, in September 1899 the score was finished, and on the 14th January 1900 the first performance of "Tosca" took place at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome. The performance was conducted by Leopoldo Mugnone (1858-1941), one of the greatest Italian conductors of international repute. The opera was directed by Tito Ricordi (1865-1933), the oldest son of Giulio the publisher. The leading role was rendered by Romanian soprano Hariclea Darclee, who was then at the peak of her career and whose physical appearance completely fitted the character. Scarpia was played by baritone Eugenio Giraldoni (1871-1924). Two tenors were available for the role of Cavaradossi: more experienced Emilio de Marchi (1861-1917) and the rising star Enrico Caruso (1873-1921). The choice fell on de Marchi, and Caruso, being disappointed, exchanged this situation for an enormous success he attained by playing the role in subsequent performances of the opera that took place in November of the same year in Bologna.

The first performance stated nervously. It was the time when anarchists were preparing assassinations of crowned state leaders, and the queen was supposed to attend the opening. When the atmosphere eased, the queen came to see the second act. The audience liked the opera, more than the critics, whose evaluation of the work was still more favourable than the earlier one of "La Boheme". They emphasised Puccini's vigorous orchestration but also stressed that his music ennobled the in essence vulgar story of the opera.

Performances of "Tosca" continued, however, with a limited appeal. Only as late as in July, when "Tosca" was performed at Covent Garden, it established itself as a pillar of the repertoire. The credit for that goes to one of the greatest operatic artists ever - Milka Trnina (1863-1941). This famous Croatian soprano was then, in the most beautiful meaning of the word, both an operatic diva and a great star, and it meant a lot to Puccini to have her for the opening night in the famous opera house on the 12th July 1900. Dissatisfied because of the pale success of the opening night in Rome, he came to London only to meet musicians not exactly thrilled by his work. However, Trnina studied the score thoroughly, rehearsed passionately and applied herself enthusiastically to this new opera, which she initially did not find very interesting. Like a genuine prima donna, she wanted to appear in full shine and thus deliberately missed the dress rehearsal. The success was sensational. Puccini wrote to his wife Elvira: *"In tragic moments, Trnina is excellent. In the moments of love and recklessness, she has not much charm. However, in the second act she was brilliant, except for the prayer, which she sings a little bit like a German."*

Trinina's partners were Italian singers, tenor Fernando de Lucia (1860-1925) and baritone Antonio Scotti (1866-1936). The opera was conducted Luigi Mancinelli (1848-1921), also an excellent artist. Puccini stated later that no other Tosca ever made it close to Trnina's. According to him, Tosca should be rendered by an artist of pronounced dramatic power, just like Trnina was. Monstre Tosca is how he called subsequent performances of the opera rendered together by Trnina, Caruso and Scotti. Trnina was also the first Tosca of Metropolitan on 4th February 1901, with partners Giuseppe Cremonini and Scotti. In the performances to follow, she sang with Caruso and Scotti, always with an enormous success. Although this role was sung by the greatest sopranos, only two of them managed to approach the perfection of Trinina's creation: Czech singer Maria Jeritza (1887- 1982) and Greek prima donna Maria Callas (1923-1977). The three leading prima donnas introduced Sardou's and Puccini's heroine in the world of true art. Zinka Kunc-Milanov (1906 -1989), another great Croatian operatic singer, was also famous as great Tosca of our times.



Giacomo Puccini