



# Tosca's Rome: The Play and the Opera in Historical Perspective

*Susan Vandiver Nicassio*

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A timeless tale of love, lust, and politics, *Tosca* is one of the most popular operas ever written. In *Tosca's Rome*, Susan Vandiver Nicassio explores the surprising historical realities that lie behind Giacomo Puccini's opera and the play by Victorien Sardou on which it is based.

By far the most "historical" opera in the active repertoire, *Tosca* is set in a very specific time and place: Rome, from June 17 to 18, 1800. But as Nicassio demonstrates, history in *Tosca* is distorted by nationalism and by the vehement anticlerical perceptions of papal Rome shared by Sardou, Puccini, and the librettists. To provide the historical background necessary for understanding *Tosca*, Nicassio takes a detailed look at Rome in 1800 as each of *Tosca*'s main characters would have seen it—the painter Cavaradossi, the singer Tosca, and the policeman Scarpia. Finally, she provides a scene-by-scene musical and dramatic analysis of the opera.

"[Nicassio] must be the only living historian who can boast that she once sang the role of Tosca. Her deep knowledge of Puccini's score is only to be expected, but her understanding of daily and political life in Rome at the close of the 18th century is an unanticipated pleasure. She has steeped herself in the period and its prevailing culture-literary, artistic, and musical-and has come up with an unusual, and unusually entertaining, history."—Paul Bailey, *Daily Telegraph*

"In *Tosca's Rome*, Susan Vandiver Nicassio . . . orchestrates a wealth of detail without losing view of the opera and its pleasures. . . . Nicassio aims for opera fans and for historians: she may well enthrall both."—*Publishers Weekly*

"This is the book that ranks highest in my estimation as the most in-depth, and yet highly entertaining, journey into the story of the making of *Tosca*."—Catherine Malfitano

"Nicassio's prose . . . is lively and approachable. There is plenty here to intrigue everyone-seasoned opera lovers, musical novices, history buffs, and Italophiles."—*Library Journal*

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