

The libretto in brief

Act I

The Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle, Rome, June 1800.

Having just escaped from the prison of Castel Sant'Angelo, the political prisoner Cesare Angelotti has sought refuge in the family chapel of his sister, the Marchioness Attavanti. The painter Mario Cavaradossi is busy painting the image of Mary Magdalen, whose face bears a clearly recognizable likeness to the Marchioness, whom Cavaradossi has in fact frequently glimpsed in the chapel. The painter recognizes Angelotti, whose revolutionary zeal he shares, and offers to help him. But the sudden entry of the celebrated singer Floria Tosca, who is Cavaradossi's lover, forces the fugitive once again to hide in the chapel. Noticing Mario's embarrassment, Tosca grows suspicious. Her doubts and jealousy are redoubled when she recognizes in the painting the face of the Marchioness Attavanti, whom she believes to be her rival in love. However, her beloved soothes her and, to hasten her departure, fixes a rendezvous with her for that same night at his villa. As soon as Tosca has gone out, Cavaradossi flees with Angelotti. In the meantime, the latter's escape has been discovered and the chief of police, the dreaded Baron Scarpia, has arrived at the church in pursuit of the fugitive. From a number of clues, he guesses that Angelotti has fled with the aid of Cavaradossi. Tosca's suspicions are again aroused, this time by the absence of her beloved. She is also irritated by Scarpia's insinuations. In the belief that she has been betrayed, she hurries to Cavaradossi's villa. The chief of police orders his agent Spoletta to follow her and then attends a solemn *Te Deum*, during which he secretly savours the foretaste of Cavaradossi's death and Tosca's love.

Act II

Scarpia's room on the top floor of the Farnese Palace.

Waiting for news of the escaped prisoner's capture, Scarpia is having supper in his room. From other rooms in the palace echoes of a court entertainment can be heard, at which Floria Tosca is

singing. After interrogating Cavaradossi, who denies any knowledge of Angelotti's hiding place, Scarpia asks Tosca, who has arrived in the meantime, if she knows anything about this. She, however, cleverly eludes the man's insidious questions. But when she hears groans from Mario, who has been put to torture in the next room, she collapses and reveals the fugitive's hiding place. Mario is brought back, bleeding, into Scarpia's room. Realizing that Tosca has spoken, he curses her in despair. On hearing news of Bonaparte's victory Cavaradossi sings the praise of liberty, before being dragged away to prison. Alone now with Tosca, Scarpia brutally offers her her lover's life in exchange for a night of love. She at first refuses, but when she learns of Angelotti's suicide and Mario's imminent execution, she accepts the deal. Scarpia then gives her to believe that a mock execution has been arranged to save Cavaradossi's life, whilst at the same time ordering Spoletta to conduct a regular execution. After handing Tosca a pass which will allow her to leave freely the Papal States with her beloved, Scarpia pounces. But Tosca stabs him to death, takes the pass and flees.

Act III

The platform of Castel Sant'Angelo.

While waiting for the firing squad, Cavaradossi tenderly remembers his moments of love spent with Tosca. But these melancholy memories are interrupted by the unexpected entry of his beloved. Tosca shows him the safe-conduct that will enable them to get away and then confesses that she has murdered Scarpia. Before standing back, Tosca illustrates to Mario the mock execution that he must go through. As if watching a play on the stage, Tosca from a distance directs Mario's death. But she quickly understands that the execution has indeed been carried out. When the guards burst in, having by now discovered the murder of the chief of police, Tosca in despair walks up to the parapet and throws herself into space, invoking the wrath of God upon Scarpia.

(Traduzione di Rodney Stringer)