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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

?Tosca? Triumphs Under the Stars

Oper Klosterneuburg, 11.07.2025 [ENA]

The majestic Kaiserhof of Stift Klosterneuburg, steeped in centuries of ecclesiastical and imperial grandeur, once again provided a stunning backdrop for a summer night of operatic brilliance. On this occasion, it was Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca*—a taut, passionate thriller that has long gripped audiences with its soaring arias, heart-wrenching drama, and moral complexity.

Under the direction of Leonard Prinsloo and the baton of Francesco Cilluffo, this 2025 production of *Tosca* by Oper Klosterneuburg is not only musically and theatrically compelling, but also a shining example of how open-air opera can achieve both intimacy and grandeur.

From the first ominous orchestral chords to the final tragic plunge, this *Tosca* brims with urgency and emotional clarity. Director Leonard Prinsloo has a sure hand for storytelling—his staging is sleek, cinematic, and driven by character psychology, ensuring that the human drama never gets lost in the spectacle. The Kaiserhof, with its historical gravitas, becomes not just a setting, but a silent participant in the unfolding tragedy.

Its arcaded façades show the echoes of jealousy, power, and sacrifice. Leading the cast is Federica Vitali as Floria Tosca, a role that demands both vocal strength and psychological nuance. Vitali is a revelation. She possesses a rich, full-bodied soprano that easily rides Puccini's surging orchestration, yet never loses the lyrical tenderness needed for *Tosca*'s moments of vulnerability. Her "Vissi d'arte" was the emotional centerpiece of the evening: haunting, heartbroken, and devastatingly human. What made her performance so effective was her natural dramatic presence—she is a *Tosca* of instinct and intensity, never theatrical for its own sake, always grounded in real emotion.

Opposite her, Fabián Lara brought a youthful, ardent presence to Mario Cavaradossi. His tenor is golden, bright, and pliant, with just enough heroic metal to deliver the climactic high notes without strain. His "Recondita armonia" was sung with painterly phrasing, and his "E lucevan le stelle" in the third act was deeply affecting—imbued with quiet resignation and poetic melancholy. Lara and Vitali's chemistry was palpable; their love duets shimmered with tenderness and tragic premonition.

As the villainous Scarpia, Serban Vasile was chilling and charismatic. Vasile brought a baritone of oily seduction and brutal force—precisely what the role demands. His Act I *Te Deum* was magnificently staged

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and sung, a masterclass in menace cloaked in religious pomp. Rather than playing Scarpia as a mere brute, Vasile explored the character's psychological complexity—his manipulation, sadism, and perverse sense of control over those around him.

The supporting cast was uniformly strong. Karl Huml was a sympathetic and dignified Angelotti, his desperation felt in every gesture. Valentino Blasina as Spoletta and Kirill Sysoev as Sciarrone were sharp, effective foils to Scarpia's authority, lending energy and menace to the police scenes. Horst Lamnek brought a touch of comedic charm as the sacristan, offering brief respite before the drama darkened. The chorus, under the fine direction of Michael Schneider, performed with precision and dramatic engagement—especially during the cathedral scenes, where their sound filled the Kaiserhof with a stirring wall of liturgical grandeur.

Francesco Cilluffo conducted the Beethoven Philharmonie with command and clarity, drawing out both the lush lyricism and the taut suspense that define Tosca. His tempi were finely judged—never rushed, always supporting the singers—and his attention to orchestral color was evident in the many sublime instrumental moments, from the sinister tremolos in the torture scenes to the warm, glistening textures of the love duets. The balance between pit and stage was ideal, a technical feat in an outdoor venue, allowing the drama to breathe without ever losing Puccini's intricate orchestral detail.

Hans Kudlich's stage design was restrained but effective. Tall, movable structures suggested the imposing architecture of Sant'Andrea della Valle and the Palazzo Farnese without overburdening the stage. The use of the natural setting—the walls, arches, and shadows of the monastery courtyard—was brilliant. Kudlich's set allowed seamless transitions between intimacy and spectacle, from whispered confessions to political executions.

Karin Fritz's costumes were sumptuous and historically grounded, emphasizing the class distinctions that underpin much of the opera's conflict. Tosca's gowns were particularly striking, evoking both her diva persona and her tragic vulnerability. Lighting by Lukas Siman sculpted each scene with atmospheric sensitivity: warm candlelight for Act I's sacred spaces, cold interrogation hues for Act II's torture chamber, and a bruised, dawn-lit palette for the final act's farewell.

Few operas offer the dramatic immediacy and musical sweep of Tosca, and few productions capture it with such cohesive artistry as this one by Oper Klosterneuburg. In every aspect—vocal, orchestral, dramatic, and visual—this Tosca delivers. The sheer level of talent onstage and behind the scenes, combined with the sublime acoustics and ambiance of the Kaiserhof, makes for a production that not only honors Puccini's masterpiece but elevates it.

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Beyond the thrilling arias and tragic lovers, this Tosca leaves a profound impression of opera as living theatre: a place where beauty and horror, love and tyranny, faith and betrayal collide in sublime musical form.

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