

## *Domingo fails to lift tired Tosca*

ANDREW MAISEL

This production of *Tosca* was first seen at the Royal Opera way back in 2006. Such has been its success that it has been revived six times and with Placido Domingo and Bryn Terfel at the helm of this current run, its popularity shows no sign of flagging.

This is a traditional production in all senses of the word. Paul Brown's sets are all massive and darkly claustrophobic, set in the correct time and place, as are the costumes (a rarity in this day and age). Unfortunately acting and movement seem to have taken us back to an era where singers moved when they needed in order to deliver their arias, with little insight into character and motive. Amy Lane, the revival director for June (there was another one for May's cast) seems to have made little conscious effort to give us anything but the bare bones of the story. Consequently chemistry between the principle characters was minimal; Tosca and Cavaradossi seeming more like strangers than lovers in their Act One exchanges.

As *Tosca*, Sondra Radvanovsky has enjoyed great success around the world, and in this, her Covent Garden debut in the role, she was in fine vocal form. Her voice is dark in tone and weighty, her upper registers totally secure. She saved her best for 'Vissi d'arte', understated and full of emotion. Her sweetly jealous *Tosca* in the first act was charming but in the crucial second act she never really convinced as a desperate woman bargaining for her lover's life.

The Italian tenor Riccardo Massi was making his Covent Garden debut here and certainly cut a dashing young Cavaradossi. Possessing a sweet if smallish voice, he brought a freshness to the role, with some neat comic asides in the first act. His background as a stuntman certainly paid dividends in his wholly convincing collapse in the third act "mock" execution.

Bryn Terfel has subtly altered his Scarpia since his interpretation of the role in the original production in 2006. His malevolence and sheer evil intent then seemed all a bit over the

©

**Londres, lunes,  
16 de junio de  
2014.** Royal  
Opera House  
(ROH) at the  
Covent Garden.



Portada de Tosca

*Tosca* opera in three acts with libretto by Luigi Illica y Giuseppe Giacosa and music by Giacomo Puccini. Stage Director: Jonathan Kent. Revival director: Amy Lane. Designs: Paul Brown. Lighting design: Mark Henderson. Floria Tosca: Sondra Radvanovsky. Mario Cavaradossi: Riccardo Massi. Baron Scarpia: Bryn Terfel. Angelotti: Michel de Souza. Spoletta: Hubert Francis. Sacristan: Tiziano Bracci. Sciarrone: Simon Wilding. Gaoler: Olle Zetterström. Royal Opera Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House. Conductor: Placido Domingo. Chorus Director: Renato Basaldona.

top. Here he seemed to have added another dimension, the sense of corruption, both morally and sexually, enhanced. His sheer physical presence is, as always, one of his most alluring attributes.

Placido Domingo's conducting tended to err on the laid back side of the interpretative coin. His violins soared passionately and lovingly around the melodic lines of Carveradossi's 'Dammi i colori...' and there was a lovely sense of hushed expectation in the opening *lento* to Act 3 where he conjured up some lovely chamber like sonorities. But all too often the requisite bite and tension, especially in the Act Two exchanges fell victim to this softly approach despite some beautifully refined playing from the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House.

For a work performed as often as *Tosca*, this production plays it safe as it gets. Its attractions are not hard to fathom, but it will disappoint those who want a bit more ambition from their opera.