

Why Seattle Opera's 'Tosca' is worth staying indoors for | The Seattle Times

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Alexandra LoBianco, left, as Tosca and Michael Chioldi as Scarpia in Seattle Opera's production of Puccini's "Tosca," filmed at St. James Cathedral. (Philip Newton)

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that can feel more appealing as the winter gray finally gives way to summer weather. And as we emerge from pandemic restrictions, a June opera stream is a particularly hard sell. Even so, it's worth blocking out two hours to watch Seattle Opera's "Tosca," [streaming](#) June 25-27.

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Why stay inside for 'Tosca'?

You've probably never seen an opera like this, and you may not get another chance to. Seattle Opera converted into a film studio during the pandemic to produce streaming performances. "Tosca" is Seattle Opera's second site-specific opera film (after "[Flight](#)," [filmed at the Museum of Flight](#)), and possibly its last; the company returns to live, in-person performances at McCaw Hall in the fall.

There have been "Tosca" movies before — [one made-for-TV "Tosca"](#) was even filmed where the story takes place. Seattle Opera didn't go to Rome, but you might believe they did. Painted wooden sets are replaced by on-site

Puccini's "Tosca" is everything we want from opera: outsized passions, violence and death, a great diva, an unredeemable villain, and music as heartbreakingly beautiful as the story is intense.

In the story, irrationally jealous opera singer Tosca is manipulated by corrupt Baron Scarpia into betraying her lover, the painter Cavaradossi, who has helped a political prisoner escape. When Cavaradossi is sentenced to death, Scarpia offers Tosca an indecent proposal for her lover's life, striking a deal neither of them intends to keep. Nearly everyone dies. On paper it's pretty sordid, but Puccini's gorgeous music elevates the experience to something sublime.

ADVERTISING

Tosca's abandoned gold crucifix. His use of shadows may be due to COVID-19 protocols but creates an unusual sense of spying on the action that you'd never get in a theater. And only film can deliver Miller's version of the powerful final scene.

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Dominick Chenes' hands, tempers his passions with rationality. He reads Voltaire. He knows that Scarpia cannot be trusted. Chenes' (previously Pinkerton in "Madama Butterfly") final duet is all the more poignant because we know he's humoring Tosca for the last time.

Debuting in Seattle as the Sacristan, Matthew Burns' dignified bass-baritone, in counterpoint to his less-than-holy behavior, provides much-needed comic relief. Andrew Stenson as the thug Spoletta is almost unrecognizable as the same performer who gave us the goofy, infatuated Nemorino in "The Elixir of Love."

The last note

A live performance is ephemeral. In theory, a film lasts forever. But "Tosca" is only available for streaming through June 27. If you miss it, there will be other "Toscas," but you may never get another chance to see this rare moment in

