

## Introduction:

Thank you so much for having me here today, and it has been an absolute delight to get to hear so much talk about divas, one of my favorite subjects : ) It's been really exciting to listen to Shannon Dooley's reflections on *Tosca*, to hear Elizabeth Wellman's amazing discussion of Taylor Swift's operatic heritage," to delve into such terrific student posters on contemporary stars, and to absorb Helena Spencer's continually inspiring work on Caterina Jarboro. Truly a wonderful way to spend a Saturday! There are *many* continuities from these presentations to what I'm going to discuss this afternoon—so once we get to discussing, please be loud about the exciting connections you see between all of our divas.

Before I get properly started this afternoon, I wanted to say *three* quick things about our diva dishing. First of all, we could not be more appropriate in our focus, because the title role of the opera *Tosca* is, after all, a famous singer (which demonstrates how divas have so captured our imagination that they don't just sing roles onstage, they inspire entire stories in their own right!) Second, as the discussions of Taylor Swift and Caterina Jarboro demonstrate, the figure of the diva is *always* about celebrity and fame—so we'll want to think about how the nature of stardom and fan culture may shift (or not!) from the late 1800s to today. Finally: amongst music historians in the past several decades, there has been an explosive growth in studying divas—especially real-life women who sang onstage over the past 400 years. This interest stems in part from delightfully compelling stories, but the new focus on divas is also **explicitly feminist**. For too long music historians tended to focus narrowly on composers—usually **male** composers—ignoring the vital role of prima donnas. So when we celebrate the lives and agency of these renowned women performers—and talk about them as we have been all day!—we are both

helping acknowledge the historical centrality of women artists and tell history in a way that's a little more just and a little more feminist. (Yay!)<sup>1</sup>

Today I'll be speaking about the 1887 play *La Tosca* and Giacomo Puccini's operatic *Tosca* (1900), two works explicitly interconnected through divas. One of the things I'll be particularly considering is how stage works, due to their repetitions over decades or even centuries, always tend to invoke memories of past performances.<sup>2</sup> Theater historian Marvin Carlson notes the stage is always ghostly in "its sense of return, the uncanny but inescapable impression imposed upon its spectators that we are 'seeing what we saw before.'"<sup>34</sup> *Performance*—specifically how actors embody characters over time—is a particularly haunted site. For theater historian Joseph Roach, performance is *always* about memory, history, and ritual, considering a endless carnival mirror of replacements for the actors we first saw in a particular role.<sup>5</sup> And while Richard Schechner noted performance is usually behaviors that are not *precisely* repeated, he admitted that the 'constancy of transmission' across generations can be astonishing."<sup>6</sup>

Today, drawing upon play texts, operatic music, staging manuals, press coverage, archival materials and much more, I focus on how a powerful performer can shape the genesis, performance, and reception of *multiple* works, stretching across genres and across borders, languages, and time. Specifically, I analyze the ways in which French actress Sarah Bernhardt's presence—and memories of her presence—haunt the characterization, vocal style, visual aesthetic, and audience reception of Puccini's *Tosca*. I invite us to revel in a more interdisciplinary reading of Puccini's opera, one which acknowledges the rich interconnections of genre, performance, and memory and realizes that plays and operas are dynamic, interconnected lineages rather than fixed texts.. I ultimately argue that, consciously or not, we

experience the operatic *Tosca* as a kind of palimpsest in which the powerful presence of earlier performances lurks within gestures, vocalizations, and shapes our reactions to this day.

### **I. Sarah Bernhardt's History and Style**

I'll begin with a bit of introductory context about Sarah Bernhardt's singular career and her unique approach to dramatic declamation and gestural style.<sup>7</sup>

Born in Paris around 1844, and spending her youth amongst the colorful *demimonde* of France's Second Empire, Sarah Bernhardt auditioned at age 15 for France's Conservatoire Impérial de Musique et Déclamation. Striking the audition committee with her unusually musical voice, Sarah was admitted as an actress, studying *comédie* and *tragédie*.<sup>8</sup> Upon completing her studies at the Conservatoire, she was immediately contracted by the Comédie-Française, France's most prestigious theater. She was not an immediate success, and bounced around a few boulevard theaters in the mid-1860s, then began an upwardly mobile period marked by gains in acting skill, discipline, and public popularity. She stunned audiences—and bewitched Victor Hugo—at the Odéon in the late 1860s, becoming the darling of the Parisian public. By 1872, she was re-signed by the Comédie-Française, eventually rising to the rank of the foremost *tragédienne* in France.

As Bernhardt became an immensely popular *and* renowned artist, tensions over money, repertoire, and artistic freedom built up between her and the Comédie-Française (a company that functioned through a time-honored system of democracy and seniority). Enticed by a particularly successful summer tour to London, Bernhardt glimpsed a future as an independent artist. In April 1880, Bernhardt broke with the Comédie-Française entirely (unheard for an artist of her stature).<sup>9</sup> She commenced her first major tour to America in 1880-1881 and was a phenomenal success, traversing the US and Canada in a specially built Pullman sleeper car and garnering more than a

million dollars in receipts. After this initial trip, Bernhardt toured repeatedly from the 1880s through the final years of her life, or more than forty years. The scope of her tours is truly mind-boggling: during the summer recess of the Parisian theatrical season, she almost always embarked on a summer season in London or a tour of various European cities. Her 1880 trip was only the first of nine extensive tours of North America —altogether, Bernhardt spent almost eight years touring the United States, Canada, and Central America alone. Her other global tours spanned nearly every corner of the world, including Russia, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Australia, New Zealand, and Africa. Ultimately, Sarah Bernhardt was probably seen onstage by more people in more parts of the world than any other public figure of the Belle Époque and emerged as one of the first truly global celebrities. She was the absolute archetype of a *diva assoluta*, the most famous female performing artist of several generations. The first modern superstar, Bernhardt became so famous that audiences across the world called her “Madame Sarah,” “The Divine Sarah,” or by her first name alone. Her success is even more intriguing considering she performed only in French, mostly to non-Francophone audiences. Her managers created a Bernhardt industry—their publicity juggernaut skillfully played off the popular press and marketed branded products such as official play librettos, publicity stills, official posters, and endorsed commercial goods.

Following her departure from the Comédie-Française in 1880, Sarah Bernhardt not only established herself as a global touring celebrity, she also continued her presence in Parisian theaters—but with a new twist. Rather than as a member of a company, she forged a unique path by establishing her company. She rented a theater, hired other actors to appear with her and playwrights to write works for her, and an entire group of managers, administrators, and other personnel. She began by renting the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin from 1883 through 1893,

then arranged to acquire the Théâtre de la Renaissance from 1893 through 1898. Eventually she ran her eponymous Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, renting the large theater on the Place du Châtelet from the city of Paris from 1898 through her death in 1923. As a powerful female director, Bernhardt was without rival as an important theatrical presence (since French theatrical law technically forbid women to serve as chief executives of theatre). That theater still bears her name today (Théâtre de la Ville/Sarah-Bernhardt).<sup>10</sup> Overall, Sarah Bernhardt's sixty-year career in theater ranged from the highest echelons of French tragedy to massive popular success to unprecedented and pioneering roles in both stardom and theatrical business. She was both the greatest French actress of her generation, and—thanks to her repeated global tours—one of the greatest transnational celebrities of the first mass media age.

#### **b. Bernhardt's acting style**

Before moving on to our specific study today, it's helpful to know just a small amount about Sarah Bernhardt's specific—and unique—approach to acting. Bernhardt's vocal style was rooted in her classical training at the Paris Conservatoire, which taught her specific techniques recitation [*chant* and *vérité*], vocal register, pronunciation, and liaison.<sup>11</sup> Bernhardt's *voix d'or*, as Victor Hugo described it, was particularly praised for its unusual musicality and consistently likened to music itself.<sup>12</sup> Actors, musicians, critics and audiences lauded the musical qualities of Bernhardt's voice, the desirably smooth fusion between her vocal registers, and called her “a model not only to actors, but also to singers.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to her musical declamation, Bernhardt created trademark vocal effects. Manipulating volume, tempo, register, vibration, and articulation, she created a “love voice”, “enraged voice,” vocalized sobs, a specific kind of savage cry, and a mannered approach to a vocalized quasi-recitative.<sup>14</sup> All three employed alteration of register, volume, and timbre. Each

style became so characteristic of Bernhardt that they were easily parodied. Moreover, these special effects were so integral to the vocal conception of Bernhardt's roles that her plays were difficult for other actresses to negotiate.<sup>15</sup> During her endless foreign tours—during which Bernhardt only performed in French for mostly non-Francophones—audiences thrilled to the grain of her voice, absorbing her declamation more as pure sound (music) than as syntactic units.<sup>16</sup>

Bernhardt's approach to gesture was steeped in the classical gestural style of actors from the Comédie-Française, yet was strongly colored by her experience in boulevard theaters. In the popular theater of the boulevard, gesture— and in particular the art of pantomime—was often a more important signifier than speech. After 1880, Bernhardt took on boulevard mannerisms, particularly **extended pantomimic death scenes** and the increased use of facial expression. These new skills helped her convey meaning to foreign audiences,<sup>17</sup> who followed plots through her movements. Specifically, her innovative gestural approach blended classical arm poses with broad gestures from French popular theater, such an emphasis on the eyes and facial expressions or kneeling in supplication. Bernhardt explained her method as “three consecutive stages: **glance, gesture, and word**.”<sup>18</sup> While her voice was incredibly important to audiences, gesture was also significant, since the glance and the gesture prepared the audience for the ensuing word. Bernhardt's gestures are difficult to recover, but some scores and play texts include explicit details about her onstage movements. Photographs, reviews, and first-hand accounts also help us reconstruct some of these relationships between sound, meaning, and movement.

## II. The Creation of *La Tosca*

The Théâtre Porte Saint-Martin (16 Boulevard Saint-Martin) was Bernhardt's first major lease as a lead actress and main financier. The Porte-Saint Martin was part of the so-called “boulevard

theaters” of Paris; unlike the Comédie-Française which was funded by the state and focused mostly on classical repertoire, the boulevard theaters were run as private businesses, tended to include a great deal of spectacle, and attracted broad audiences from many different classes. In the case of the Porte Saint-Martin, the 1800-seat theater with a deep stage was the perfect venue for lavish productions. After her break with the Comédie-Française in 1880, Sarah Bernhardt was no longer forced to appear in assigned roles. She suddenly had the freedom to commission spectacular new plays written particular FOR her which showcased her unique talents. Much like Broadway today, a hit play might run for an entire season or more to sell-out crowds of locals and tourists.

The first of these was the blockbuster hit *Fédora*, written by Victorien Sardou in 1882. Sardou wrote an additional six plays especially for Bernhardt over a period of twenty years, whose plots blended romance, historical events, and sensational violence. Their subject matter and style drew on boulevard styles of drama, and often incorporated mélodrame and pantomime. Sardou’s plays, therefore, were quite different from those Bernhardt had performed during her tenure at the Comédie-Française. The meticulous settings and costumes of his work diverged from the universalist backdrop of classical drama. Most took place in distant times or places, and the plots, settings, and characters often emphasized exoticism. In Sardou’s works, Bernhardt portrayed a limited set of character archetypes: princesses, courtesans, femmes fatales, or other violently passionate women. Freud joked about the repetitive nature of the characters and their names, noting that “Sardou has already written a Dora and Feodora [sic] and is said to be writing a Thermadora, Ecuadora, and Torredora!”<sup>19</sup>

*La Tosca*, which opened in November 1887 at the Porte Saint-Martin, was Victorien Sardou’s third tailor-made vehicle for Sarah Bernhardt. The collaboration between Sardou and Bernhardt

permeated *La Tosca* from conception to rehearsal to performance.<sup>20</sup> An actress in Bernhardt's company who noted that in rehearsal it was difficult to tell who had written *La Tosca* and who was performing it. In fact, the play was fashioned *from* Sarah Bernhardt; the title role incorporated a dense web of qualities based on Bernhardt—"Sardou's heroines," one critic noted, "are almost always Sarah Bernhardts."<sup>21</sup> Specifically, *La Tosca* integrated Bernhardt's trademark vocal and gestural techniques. The love scenes and *coquetterie* of the initial acts highlighted the *voix d'amour*, while the dramatic power of the last three acts provided ample occasion for her *voix de rage*, tears in the voice, and savage cries.<sup>22</sup> These vocal hallmarks were so integral to tailor-made Bernhardt roles that other actresses struggled to perform her roles.<sup>23</sup>

The Porte-Saint Martin production was visually spectacular, mixing the lavish *mise-en-scène* of Romantic drama and the tableaux construction of popular theatre. Bernhardt's renowned attention to costuming was evident in her first appearance onstage as Floria Tosca—in rosebud-printed dress, long-flowered scarf, huge plumed "Lebrun" hat, shoulder-height ceramic cane, and a "Bernhardt" bouquet resting along the length of her left arm—prompted spontaneous audience applause. Her gestural vocabulary—particularly her facial expressions and gestures of supplication—suffused the playtext. [Bernhardt knelt at least 8 times during the play.]<sup>24</sup> Floria Tosca habitually used gesture to externalize sensory perception; throughout the play she continually **looks** and **listens**.<sup>25</sup>

In the extended pantomime in Act IV, Floria **trembles**, **looks**, **glances** and **listens** within a large pantomimic complex. Her combination of glance & gesture negates the need for spoken text, as when she "catches sight of the knife, stops and looks at Scarpia, and then slowly pulls the knife toward her."<sup>26</sup> In addition to the foregrounding of gestures related to the senses, Bernhardt performed a celebrated pantomime of slowly placing candlesticks and a crucifix around Scarpia's

chest. The level of detail is astonishing—both the stage directions and critical commentary noted specific innovations such as **turning her back to the audience while** placing the candlesticks, to carrying the crucifix so Christ’s head faced the audience, to her quiet exit from the stage.

This scene foregrounds gesture instead of spoken text and the celebrated “silence” of this was in actuality filled with diegetic sound. A threefold roll of snare drums and trumpet calls provided a careful diegetic soundtrack for Bernhardt’s Act IV gestures, syncing with the **placement of the crucifix** and accompanying her exit. Indeed, *La Tosca*’s boulevard-inspired aesthetic **necessitated** music for pantomimed mute scenes, spectacular tableaux, and sound effects such as the Act I cannon blasts. I have located the lost incidental music score for the 1887 *La Tosca* production, which included thirteen numbers by the Theatre Porte Saint-Martin’s resident conductor/composer Louis Pister.<sup>27</sup> Synchronizing with stage gesture, Pister’s music established specific soundscapes for each act, from the liturgical numbers of Act I to Act II’s 18th-century temporal markers and Roman local color to the drumrolls and trumpet calls of Acts IV and V.<sup>28</sup> I should note that this image I have here is of Sarah Bernhardt’s Act II costume, which is really a cute little clever moment—Sardou had her preparing to sing a victory cantata (makes sense, she’s a singer in the plot). The corresponding incidental music number is in yellow here. And she holds the sheet music up and prepares to sing and.....oh wait, the whole thing is interrupted by a messenger. It’s very clever.

*La Tosca* was a smash hit in November 1887. Upon the play’s conclusion, first-night audience members shouted “Sarah! Sarah!” instead of applauding Sardou.<sup>29</sup> Parisian critics pondered whether *La Tosca* was written by Sardou or Bernhardt, saying it was impossible to separate the author from the actress/performer.”<sup>30</sup> It was difficult to separate the bodies of character and actress; *Le Gaulois* noted Bernhardt had “transfused all her blood into Floria Tosca, through

**whose** eyes she weeps all her tears and whose nerves are her nerves...the role is molded to her like a plaster cast is molded to a face.”<sup>31</sup> Pierre Veron joked that Sardou should no longer be called an author, but a “tailor to the stars.”<sup>32</sup> Intriguingly, critic Henry Berdalle de La Pommeraye defended Sardou by comparing *La Tosca* to *musical composition*, stating “What is the harm that an author would do for a dramatic artist the same thing a composer does for a singer, by writing scenes and dialogue and taking the temperament of the interpreter into account, in the same way that a composer writes tunes while thinking of the register and voice of the singer?” Intimately fitted to the voice, body, and abilities of Sarah Bernhardt, *La Tosca*’s made-to-measure aesthetic invokes recent scholarship which has analyzed debates performer’s roles as creative presence in the 19th century.

French critics grumbled *La Tosca* was explicitly designed for **foreign exportation**, particularly its “sweeping events that attract the eyes and move the body physically.”<sup>33</sup> Critic Henry Fouquier felt every word was a pretext for a gesture or action,<sup>34</sup> such an intensely visual aesthetic prohibits again seeing the characters **abstractly**; the author sees them already incarnated, in all their specificity, by their interpreter.”<sup>35</sup> Despite unanimous praise for Bernhardt, the emphasis on visual appeal, spectacle, and gesture generated strong negative opinions, while the play’s violence—particularly Mario’s offstage torture—drew particular criticism as a subject *beyond* drama, even language. Deriding *La Tosca*’s physicality as “more for the eyes than the mind, and as empty of meaning as an opera libretto,”<sup>36</sup> Jules Lemaître wrote, “It little matters what Tosca says, we no longer pay attention to the words she uses. The play could do without words, we don’t hear them...the feelings of Tosca are so violent and simple that they can **only be expressed by cries, moans, howls, roars, sobs**, or even **solely by gestures**—twisted hands, tangled hair, kneeling—or **even by nothing**, like Niobe’s motionless silence.””<sup>37</sup>

Amidst this complicated set of praise for Bernhardt and concerns about the artistic value of Sardou's text, one thing was undeniable: *La Tosca* was box-office gold. Sarah Bernhardt performed the title role of Floria Tosca at least 150 times in Paris during the 1887, 1888, and 1889 seasons, not including innumerable performances of the role outside of the French capital. *La Tosca* remained in Bernhardt's repertoire throughout her career, with major revivals in 1897, 1899, and 1909. Despite her repeated plunges off the parapet, to some degree Bernhardt's Tosca died every night.....but never died. It remained popular her entire career, exported across the world, endlessly replicated and immediately recognizable. And as we turn now to the *operatic Tosca*, it's important to remember that Sarah Bernhardt was always already first in the eyes and ears of any audience.

### **III. Giacomo Puccini and the operatic *Tosca***

During the protracted genesis of the operatic *Tosca*, both composer and librettist's perception of the drama originated with Sarah Bernhardt. [And I will add that this was not only true about *Tosca*; in fact, more than twenty operas were based on plays linked with Bernhardt].

Bernhardt took *La Tosca* to Italy in the spring of 1889, and librettist Ferdinando Fontana (1850-1919) urged Italian composer Giacomo Puccini to attend her performances. Puccini saw Bernhardt perform *La Tosca* on February 14, 1889 and again on March 17 in Turin. By May 1889, he was very enthusiastic about setting *La Tosca* as an opera.<sup>38</sup> His publisher Ricordi secured the rights from Sardou by January 1891, and through Puccini's intervention Luigi Illica took on the job of transforming the play into an opera libretto. The project progressed to contract stage by November 1891, but various problems ensued, and the project even fell apart completely in the mid-1890s.<sup>39</sup> Puccini was back on board by 1895, and went to see Bernhardt

perform *Tosca* AGAIN in October 1895, this time with Illica's completed libretto in hand.<sup>40</sup>

Giuseppe Giacosa came on board during the fall of 1895 to turn Illica's scenario into poetic verse, and Giacosa had likewise seen Bernhardt perform *La Tosca* many times, and even written an earlier play [*La Dame de Challant*] for her.<sup>41</sup>

Thus: while working on his opera, Giacomo Puccini saw Bernhardt in *La Tosca* **three times in six years**—her gesture, pantomime, and vocal inflection was designed for viewers like him, with little knowledge of French. He particularly praised her vocalizations of anguish and her splendid acting in the torture scene.<sup>42</sup> Puccini's librettist Giacosa, however, complained to Ricordi that “even in the spoken theater *Tosca* has never become part of the normal repertoire. It is a drama reserved for the virtuosity of an exceptional actress.”<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, memories and revenants of Bernhardt and the 1887 play pervade the **soundscape, vocal style, visual aesthetic, performance, and reception** of Puccini's opera. As a composer, Puccini was renowned for creative offstage sounds and diegetic music,<sup>44</sup> yet his opera's tolling of the Angelus, the Te Deum, 18th-century dance tunes, cannon blasts and drumrolls are all sonic remnants of the Sardou-Bernhardt play. I'd like to play you a couple of these.

Likewise, vocalizations “beyond” singing permeate *Tosca*: from copious use of *parlato* and *quasi-parlato* to frequent *gridando/grido* (shouted) and *urlando* (screamed).<sup>45</sup> [There are also *Tosca*'s celebrated moments that remain almost on a single pitch: her three-fold curse of “go to hell” (*muori dannato*) and “e avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma” (C).”] Many *Toscas* speak these lines rather than singing them—Maria Callas, for example, does so in the 1964 Zeffirelli production at Covent Garden. The intrusion of this spoken moment may provide a distant echo of Bernhardt's voice.<sup>46</sup>

Visually and gesturally, Puccini's *Tosca* is still more strikingly imprinted by Bernhardt's exemplar. Puccini's compositional process was already marked by the visual dimension; when asked whether he heard music or saw images when he composed, Puccini replied: "I see, above all I see. I see the characters and the colors and gestures of the characters. I am a man of the theatre. I make theatre."<sup>47</sup> He insisted that the action of the drama be self-explanatory, that the spectator to follow the drama even without understanding the actual words." As Puccini composed, visual memories of Bernhardt likely made it impossible for him to see Floria *abstractly* rather than Bernhardt/Tosca. Indeed, Puccini's opera even retained minute gestural continuities from Bernhardt—for example, in both play and opera, Tosca lowers herself to the floor as she pleads with Scarpia, then bursts into tears and buries her face in the back of the couch.

The strongest connective tissues between the play and the opera takes place in the sequential gestural complex in the Act II murder scene. Puccini's opera incorporated this pantomimed scene *nearly* point by point. Puccini even seemed to recall the specific tempo of Bernhardt's movements, as he wrote in the autograph score's "scena dei candelieri" that the soprano should "walk slowly." Interestingly, even the few details of Bernhardt's staging that Puccini slightly altered—such as the turned back, the spotting of the dress, and particular angle of the crucifix—were restored in some early productions, such as the 1903 performances staged by Albert Carré at Paris's Opéra-Comique.

Surprisingly, the overall **reception** of Puccini's opera was also profoundly shaped by the memories of the stage drama. In assessing the operatic reception, I analyzed reviews from Italy, Argentina, Great Britain, the United States, and France. While my focus began with premieres, I also studied reception of reprises and performances at smaller houses as well, looking for

continuities or shifts in critical and public discourse. The specifics of each case are important, but what I present here are two intriguing critical strands which reappear in much of the reception history of Puccini's *Tosca* across different countries and different decades:

Thread #1: Critics across the world denounced *Tosca*'s brutal subject matter as antithetical to music. Cavaradossi's torture, the attempted rape of Tosca, and the murder of Scarpia pushed at the limits of musical representation.<sup>48</sup> Parisian critic Pierre Lalo pointed specifically to physical suffering as "exactly the kind of thing where music has the least to do...there is nothing in it that could suit music; rather, everything in it is repugnant to music, repels music, excludes, music."<sup>49</sup>

Some argued Puccini resorted to "extramusical" techniques in these scenes, namely the abundance of accompanied recitative in Act II, or the use of speech rather than singing at climactic moments. A British review argued: "When the composer most wishes to be intense, there is little save irritating noise—much sound with little musical sense. This remark applies chiefly to the second act. There are some who say they best enjoy Wagner's music at the theatre by shutting their eyes and not being worried by what is taking place on stage. In the second act of *La Tosca*, on the contrary, it is the sound of the music that seems to interfere with the undoubtedly strong dramatic situation."<sup>50</sup>

Thread #2: This overarching visual aesthetic and the memories of the source text seemed to strain the boundaries of a successful opera for audiences and critics. In the 1910s, a English critic noted that *Tosca* is "an opera for the eye and the marrow. The ear simply supplements what the eye receives. The music is only discoverable by an effort of will and merely fills in the pauses of movement."<sup>51</sup> Even in positive reviews, lukewarm praise noted Puccini "didn't strive to do more than illustrate the drama." The preexistent play distinctly held the upper hand in the partnership, with Puccini's music in second place. Negative reviews even suggested (intriguingly) that there

was little music in *Tosca* at all. English critic J.F. Runciman's searing critique described *Tosca* as "incidental music,"<sup>52</sup> while Herbert Thompson called the opera "little more than a veneer to the drama...on a first hearing one hardly realizes there is a musical side to the score."<sup>53</sup>

Ultimately, the aural, visual, and gestural exigencies and *memories* of the stage play seemed to overpower the opera. This is a bit ironic for us, of course, since Puccini's *Tosca* is massively popular today—it perennially appears in the top 5 of most-performed operas each year. (in the last 5 years, for example, there have been nearly 1000 productions of *Tosca* globally, yielding over 3,600 individual performances).<sup>54</sup> These are those strange oddities we find when studying history; that something that seems so inevitable and popular to us today is in fact inextricably interwoven with a previous text, in ways that composers, critics, and audiences *strained* to untangle to such a degree that the opera itself struggled at times.

#### **IV. Generations of Divas**

And this held true not just for composers, critics, and audiences, but for the divas, too—those women performers tasked with performing the central role of the *Tosca*, the titular tragic singer Floria Tosca. Sarah Bernhardt shaped not just the operatic *Tosca*'s text but its onstage realization, in part through her prodigious influence on generations of sopranos. Her career spanned a period of great artistic fluidity between the *arts de dire* (singing and speaking)—musicologist Katherine Bergeron explains that singers during this era "established a new singerly discourse centered on the speaking voice."<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Sarah Bernhardt served as a friend, magnet, inspiration, and teacher for singers for more than forty years, from Christine Nilsson to Lilli Lehmann, Emma Eames, Nellie Melba, Georgette LeBlanc, Mary Garden, Geraldine Farrar, and many others. In particular, Bernhardt's singular acting style, appearance, unique interpretative insights and even

her voice itself had an overwhelming influence on a generation of singers.<sup>56</sup> Soprano Nellie Melba, for example, was taken to see Bernhardt in 1889, and went to her backstage dressing room after the performance. Melba recalled “She leaped from her box and taking my hand said to me, “You sing like an angel. I want to teach you to act like an angel too. Listen.” And then without more ado she started to go through with me the part of Marguerite in Faust. It was a revelation. Little points of character which I had overlooked were made to live before my eyes. Subtle touches of gesture were introduced—all the more marvellous when one remembers that Sarah had never played the part herself, and had only seen it once or twice on the stage...every time in the years to come when I listened to Valentine singing those words, “Sois maudite,” it called up the vision of Sarah Bernhardt.”<sup>57</sup> Melba also wrote that “no voice ever had the same effect upon me as Sarah’s.”

And long before the composition of Puccini’s opera, singers had worshipped Bernhardt’s Floria Tosca. After seeing the 1887 Parisian production, American soprano Emma Eames reenacted the celebrated pantomime at home, putting two candles on the floor “to show her mother how impressive the murder of Scarpia had been.”<sup>58</sup> Drawn by newly porous boundaries between spoken theater and opera and shifting operatic acting styles, once Puccini composed the operatic *Tosca*, some singers turned to Bernhardt for advice. Geraldine Farrar, for example, worked with her while preparing for the 1909 Metropolitan Opera season. Lionizing Bernhardt as the unique authority *for whom this drama was written*, Farrar recalled: “I asked her to show me how she histrionically interpreted certain phrases of the rôle. We went over the part scene by scene. She read the lines in her way, and I sang them in mine.”<sup>59</sup>

Bernhardt’s presence shaped sopranos in other ways as well. Adolf Hohenstein’s costumes for the Roman opera premiere precisely copied Bernhardt’s 1887 *costumes*, and sopranos even

seemed to mirror her poses in publicity photographs.<sup>60</sup> If you look at my images here, we see Bernhardt in the center, then generations of soprano Toscas: starting with Haricléa D'Arclée in the upper left, then Milka Ternina, Olive Fremstad, and including Emma Eames, Geraldine Farrar, and hosts of lesser-known singers. Dressed in the same attire and performing the same gestures—particularly voiceless pantomimes, where the difference between an opera singer and an actress is especially porous—connected these sopranos to the original actress in a sort of embodied or *carnal knowledge* across genres and time. Elisabeth Le Guin has written in relation to performing music: “I am aware of acting the connection between parts of someone who cannot be here in the flesh....my experience of becoming that person is grounded in and expressed through the medium of the tactile.”<sup>61</sup>

Few today recall that Bernhardt performed *La Tosca* for more than twenty-five years, in thousands of performances across the globe. After 1900, operatic audiences did not attend Puccini's *Tosca* and dimly recall that Bernhardt had once appeared in the play. Rather, she was **still before their eyes, in their ears, sometimes quite literally across town** from the opera or the movie house. While reviewing the first French production of Puccini in 1903, Parisian critic Paul Flat wrote that “the intensity of certain scenes in *Tosca*, as they were played by Sarah Bernhardt, is still *very* present in our memories.”<sup>62</sup> In 1912-1913, Bernhardt toured the United States once again, performing single act excerpts from *La Tosca* and other plays on the Orpheum Vaudeville Circuit. She spent more than 40 weeks on tour and amassed an astounding \$170,000 in personal income. By this time, her *Tosca* was competing with not just the opera, but her own **silent film version** of *La Tosca* as well, a twelve-minute, one-reel version directed by André Calmettes. Released by the French company Film d'Art, the shooting technique was based on the theatrical play and attempt to depict a “single angle as if from the front row of a theater.” No

evidence confirms Puccini's music ever accompanied Bernhardt's film, but these multiple media intensified the continual rewriting of cultural and individual memories of *Tosca*.

Thus for more than 40 years after the premiere of the Sardou play, memories of Bernhardt—her ghost, if you will—remained quite corporeal for audiences and critics alike. This constellation of ghosted presences proved both inspirational and formidable for soprano Toscas. For decades, sopranos were explicitly measured against Bernhardt. In 1900 at Covent Garden, Milka Ternina “took Sarah Bernhardt as her model, with the best possible results.” In 1920, Henry Krehbiel noted soprano Maria Jeritza's “Vissi d'Arte” “was sung as Madame Bernhardt might have spoken it,” adding that Jeritza was a “**singer impelled by the spirit of a great tragedienne**.” Such comparisons proved daunting for others. In 1905, American soprano Emma Eames felt it was “courageous to play the role of Tosca in Paris, where Sarah Bernhardt had acted it first.”<sup>63</sup> Catulle Mendès described soprano Claire Fiché as having to “**battle against the delicious memory** of Sarah Bernhardt.”<sup>64</sup> Nellie Melba, who contemplated performing *Tosca* for many years yet never appeared in the role, attempted to manage expectations by stating that “dramatically, it is, of course, very trying, but though I do not pretend to be a Bernhardt, I believe people would be interested in my rendering of it.”<sup>65</sup> And critic Ernest Newman noted in 1917 that “Tosca herself is a character for a great virtuoso of an actress like Sarah Bernhardt,” before stating the soprano in question lacked the requisite qualities for the role.

And the influence of originals persists more than a century later. In 2009, the Metropolitan Opera unveiled a new staging of *Tosca* by Swiss director Luc Bondy, replacing the beloved 1985 Zeffirelli version. One of Bondy's major blocking changes in this 2009 *Tosca* was to reject the traditional staging of Act II's stabbing scene. Eschewing the elaborate pantomime with crucifix and candlesticks, Bondy directed his soprano to fall back on the couch. Anthony Tommasini

described the staging as “after stabbing Scarpia, Tosca muses on a couch in his rooms at the palazzo instead of enacting the ritual of expiation with the candles and the crucifix that Puccini devised...”. Alex Ross pithily said, “Tosca murders, then dithers.” Audience responses to the changes were NOT kind. The *New York Times* reported that “when Mr. Bondy and the production team appeared on stage during curtain calls, the audience erupted in boos”—and critical opinion was equally negative.<sup>66</sup> Even after opening night, “in every performance, the boos keep coming from the audiences.”<sup>67</sup> After repeated failures with the public, the Met finally pulled the Bondy staging after just 59 performances, retiring it in 2017 and commissioning yet another *Tosca* production (this time from David McVicar).<sup>68</sup> Certainly Bondy irked audiences for a number of reasons, but summarily omitting this cornerstone of over a hundred years seemed truly a step too far for many.

### **Conclusion**

Today, I have presented a few examples of how the spectral presence of Sarah Bernhardt has haunted 20th and 21st century opera in general and Giacomo Puccini’s *Tosca* in particular. Thinking about performance in this way allows us to deeply attend to a rich tapestry of vocal practices, to focus on embodied memory and stage gesture (not just notes), to analyze stage works through an interdisciplinary lens, to study plays and operas not just as premieres or single performances but **across time and place**. And of course it helps us reconnect with these powerful ancestors, the divas of generations past who sometimes literally seem at our shoulders or animating our breath. And as Elizabeth Le Guin has noted in her “carnal musicology,” it is not *just* performers who feel the presence of the past, but “the listener-observer will feel them too (or will at least feel that the performer feels them).” Thus, whether soprano or audience member,

critic or orchestral musician, we all experience the presence of Sarah Bernhardt in *Tosca*, though the actress herself is long-dead.

<sup>1</sup> See Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford UP 2012). Rachel and Hilary note: “Over the past thirty years or so, the study of singers has migrated from the periphery to the cutting edge of scholarship, emerging as a vibrant, interdisciplinary area of inquiry that is reshaping how we think about operatic composition and performance. Much of this reflects sea changes within the arts and humanities, bringing to musicology an emphasis on the contingencies of creation and production, a historization of performance practices, and a new awareness of the mutability of “the musical work” itself. But the major propellant has surely been the development of gender and sexuality studies, whose theoretical interventions have shed light on links between music, gender, and sexuality, and how these have interacted over time in the phenomenon of the prima donna.” (x)

<sup>2</sup> In *Spectres de Marx* (1993), Jacques Derrida called for “living with ghosts” as a means of disrupting received knowledge and studying subjects typically omitted from history. See Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993) and Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, “Spectrographies,” in *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. by Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002). First published in France as *Échographies de la télévision, Entretiens filmés* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996).

See also Freud and the uncanny: Note: I’m not super interested in Freud about this, but the uncertainty of time and place is important.

Derrida’s ghosts open a portal to the “absent presence” of the past, a commingling of spectral layers of past, present, and future. Derrida’s concept is particularly suited to the repeated repertoire of drama, which invokes memories of past performances.

Derrida himself began with theater—*Spectres de Marx* is prefaced by a line from Hamlet’s conversation with his father’s ghost (“the time is out of joint,” Act 1, scene 5), and Derrida returns to Hamlet’s ghost throughout the work. Ghosts may be everywhere but the spectral turn has focused overwhelmingly on fiction and film. Curious because ghosts on stage are ancient, every culture forms its version of the supernatural and theatre is often a primary vehicle for its transmission. (Noh drama, African dramas). Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* after all focuses on the ghost of Hamlet’s father and Derrida’s exploration of hauntology has a distinctive theatrical dimension.

For recent work linking spectrality and theatre, see *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance, and Modernity*, eds. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>4</sup> For the use of the spectral as “conceptual metaphor,” and a reader based on the spectral turn, see *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, ed. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University, 1996), 2-3. I—that we always filter our understandings by the people we have seen originally. through surrogation, an uncanny process where individuals attempt to fit gaps left through loss, trauma, death. Roach described this “doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins as “the most important of the many meanings that users intend when they say the word performance.”

<sup>6</sup> Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35-38.

<sup>7</sup> We can listen to her timbre, instrumental qualities, range, pitch, and performance techniques.

My analysis of Bernhardt’s vocal training and general vocal style is indebted to Gerda Taranow’s excellent discussion in *The Art of Sarah Bernhardt*. See also Bernhardt’s own comments on voice and acting in a series of essays collected and edited by L’art du théâtre, 1923.

<sup>8</sup> Bernhardt recited “Les deux pigeons” from *La Fontaine*, and supposedly did so in a “liquid and resonant tone.” Though all of this is rather apocryphal, she allegedly moved Auber to tell her “his only regret her voice was not destined for music.” This became a legend of sorts—she includes it in *Ma Double vie* and even a similar scene in an autobiographical novel as late as 1920.

<sup>9</sup> She was sued by the company for breach of contract, and ordered to pay an immense penalty of 100,000 francs. This punishment would hang over her head until 1900

<sup>10</sup> It was rechristened “Théâtre de la Cité” during the Nazi occupation.

<sup>11</sup> Taranow notes that these approaches were linked to Joseph-Isidore Samson and François Joseph Pierre Regnier; Samson and Regnier built on Conservatoire legacies traceable to actors Talma and Molé. The Art of Sarah Bernhardt, 5. She also mastered styles of recitation that emphasized the “music” of poetry (chanter) and the meaning of the verse (verité)

<sup>12</sup> We have recordings of Bernhardt’s voice from later periods (circa 1903-1918) but it’s difficult to ascertain whether they resemble her style in earlier decades, or whether these selected tirades and recitations represent her overall vocal technique.

The voix d’or designation—repeated ad infinitum throughout Bernhardt’s career—likely refers to contemporary vocal theories on the “metal” of voices. Hugo allegedly stated this during the 1872 revival of *Ruy Blas*, when he worked with Bernhardt.

For more on the pervasive connection between Bernhardt’s voice and music, see Brooks, “Sharing the Stage with the voix d’or: Sarah Bernhardt and music in the Belle Epoque,” Ph.D. diss., Washington University in Saint Louis, 2010, particularly pp. 34-73.

<sup>13</sup> “P.Z.,” “Je ne pense pas cependant que l’on ait relevé jusqu’ici les qualités musicales qui existent chez elle et qu’une oreille exercée peut facilement saisir. Mme Sarah Bernhardt possède un contralto ou mezzo-soprano grave qui, sauf les situations pathétiques où le cri devient presque nécessaire, se meut habituellement entre le sol au-dessous de la ligne et l’ut du médium. Cet organe, chacun le sait, est d’un timbre pénétrant, d’une suavité extraordinaire; mais avec quel talent l’artiste sait en user! La fusion des registres, tant recommandée par les grands professeurs de chant, se remarque chez Mme Sarah Bernhardt à un degré merveilleux. Une sorte de voix mixte relie les notes de poitrine à celles du médium, de façon à produire un clavier d’une homogénéité parfaite. Ce système présente également l’avantage de prévenir la tension excessive des ligaments vocaux: l’artiste joue presque tous les soirs, parfois même après paru dans une première représentation donnée en matinée et l’organe conserve une fraîcheur de sonorité qui tient du prodige. Dans *Fédora* que l’éminente tragédienne vient de jouer avec tant de succès au théâtre des Galeries Saint-Hubert, les dernières scènes du drame passionnaient particulièrement la foule, mais pour le dilettante musicien, rien n’était plus intéressant que de suivre attentivement l’interprétation du deuxième acte avec ses nuances si délicates, ses inflexions si variées. Dans cette scène comme dans les premiers actes du Sphinx et le troisième scène d’Adrienne Lecouvreur, Mme Sarah Bernhardt est un modèle à proposer non seulement aux artistes de la comédie, mais aussi aux artistes lyriques, surtout à une époque où la déclamation musicale prend dans l’opéra une importance toujours croissante,” *Le Guide musical*, 17 and 24 May 1883, 29.

<sup>14</sup> In terms of timbre and special vocal techniques, Bernhardt believed that an actor’s voice should have all possible qualities, which she described as “harmonies.” She delineated these harmonies as grave, plaintive, vibrante and métallique. Gerda Taranow, who offers the closest reading of Bernhardt’s declamatory technique, suggests that grave (deep) and métallique (metallic) may correspond to specific larynx positions. The other two vocal colors, vibrato and a specifically pathetic tone (plaintive), were special vocal colors. See Taranow, 45-63, 30-31.

<sup>15</sup> When the English actress Mrs. Patrick [Stella] Campbell appeared in the Bernhardt vehicle *Fedora* in 1895, she suffered vocal strain. Campbell biographer Margot Peters notes that “*Fedora* was a part written for the vocal acrobatics of Sarah Bernhardt...vocal tricks that ran the gamut from sibilant cooings to spine-tingling shrieks. Stella was already famous for her ‘wind-in-the-chimney’ voice, but it did not have Bernhardt’s range.” Peters, *Mrs. Pat*, 108.

<sup>16</sup> During an 1891 tour of Australia, The Sydney Bulletin published a (perhaps apocryphal) statement on the phenomenon: Overheard at Cleopatra: ‘I say mister, when is she going to sing?’ ‘Shhh, she doesn’t sing.’ ‘No? I though all of them blooming foreigners sang and did the high-kick business.’

<sup>17</sup> Charles Bigot’s review of *La Tosca* echoed the well-trodden precept that “written words are only an old language,” whereas “gesture is the universal language.” Bigot, “Ce qu’elle a gagné dans ses voyages, où elle n’a rien perdu, à jouer devant un public auquel devait bien souvent échapper une partie des mots, c’est un développement extraordinaire de a mimique, de l’action tragique. La parole n’est que d’une aïeule language; la geste est la langue universelle. On s’explique bien que Mme Sarah Bernhardt ait pu soulever l’enthousiasme de ceux-là même qui ne comprenaient qu’imparfaitement le français,” *Le Siècle*, 28 November 1887. For more on ties between antiquity and eighteenth-century ideas about gesture and universality, see Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Her lengthy pantomimed death scenes became a particular hallmark. Bernhardt times she deliberately thwarted audience expectations by intentionally turning her back on the audience.

<sup>19</sup> Hannah Decker, *Freud, Dora, and Vienna* 1900, 134.

<sup>20</sup> Sardou directed all the rehearsals, working through the “gestures, intonations, and play of physiognomy” with Sarah Bernhardt and her company (see Paul Renouard’s illustrations in Figure ?)—should have this on slide.

<sup>21</sup> Sardou’s heroines are almost always Sarah Bernhardts. . . Fedora, Gismonda, La Tosca, are but a single woman who transmigrates from play to play. We find her in different countries and different times; but she always lures and fascinates a man, storms against insuperable circumstances, coos and caws, and in the outcome dies. Clayton Hamilton, *The Theory of the Theatre and Other Principles of Dramatic Criticism*, 1910.

<sup>22</sup> In terms of timbre and special vocal techniques, Bernhardt believed that an actor’s voice should have all possible qualities, which she described as “harmonies.” She delineated these harmonies as grave, plaintive, vibrante and métallique. Gerda Taranow, who offers the closest reading of Bernhardt’s declamatory technique, suggests that grave (deep) and métallique (metallic) may correspond to specific larynx positions. The other two vocal colors, vibrato and a specifically pathetic tone (plaintive), were special vocal colors. See Taranow, 45-63, 30-31.

<sup>23</sup> See the review of Eleonora Duse’s performance in *Fédora*: “...she has, too, a curious habit of preparing for a thrilling word by a moment’s pause, filled in with eloquent fingers and flaming eyes. This is, indeed, adroit, but she of the golden voice [Bernhardt] resorts to no such device to give emphasis to her sufficient words...the Italian’s tones, though firm, full, and perfectly controlled, lack the smooth harmony that makes the voice of Bernhardt as high above rivalry as is her genius.” *New York Times*, 28 January 1893.

In 1895, when English actress Stella Patrick Campbell attempted the role of *Fédora*, she lost her voice. Campbell biographer Margot Peters notes that “Fedora was a part written for the vocal acrobatics of Sarah Bernhardt...vocal tricks that ran the gamut from sibilant cooings to spine-tingling shrieks. Stella was already famous for her ‘wind-in-the-chimney’ voice, but it did not have Bernhardt’s range.” Peters, *Mrs. Pat*, 108.

<sup>24</sup> In front of the Madonna, Act I, three times in Act III (twice to beg Mario, once to beg Scarpia), once to beg Scarpia in Act IV and then to place the crucifix on his chest, and twice in Act V, once to hold the living Mario in her arms and once to hold his dead body.

<sup>25</sup> When Floria tried to conceal Angelotti’s location in Act III, she nearly betrayed him with a gesture, and her Act IV assent to Scarpia’s demand is not only preceded by a gesture, but her “yes” was delivered “in a murmur, more in the gesture than in the line.” During the Act IV murder scene, for example, Floria first refuses to look at Scarpia, then regards him with terror. After the stabbing, she leans over and looks into his eyes, then goes upstage and listens at the door “without losing sight of Scarpia.” They look at each other as he suffocates, then “calmly, without taking her eyes off him,” Tosca performs her ablutions. She looks around the room several more times, then moves to the upstage door and “sticks her head out to listen” before exiting. Other characters do so less frequently, although Scarpia gazes at Tosca twice in Act II.

<sup>26</sup> This is the exact example Bernhardt uses from her own treatise of glance-gesture-word. Have quote from *L’art du théâtre* here. See also Taranow’s discussion in *The Art of Sarah Bernhardt*, 86. This approach was not lost on spectators: many critics noted the exact moment of the perception of the knife, detailed the pantomime motion-by-motion, and were physically effected by Bernhardt’s skill. Henry Bauer, for example, noted the audience’s skin quivered when she seized the knife from the table, while Sarcey commented that the somber horror of Bernhardt’s physiognomy sent a thrill of terror through the audience as everyone held their breath

<sup>27</sup> Pister’s score for *La Tosca* has been overlooked by musicologists, but I have located a manuscript copy in the National Library of Australia, J.C. Williamson Collection, MUS JCW 340/I. It is unclear whether Sardou, Bernhardt, or Duquesnel requested the music from Pister.

In addition to composing—largely *mélodies*, marches, and arrangements, but also a *légend-symphonique* (Roland, 1885)—Pister held a number of conducting positions in Paris. He served as deputy conductor for Pasdeloup’s *Concerts Populaires* (1880s), resident conductor at the *Porte Saint-Martin* (ca 1887-1890), leader of the concert series at the *Jardin d’acclimation* (1893-1896), and head of musical matinee concerts at the *Théâtre Marigny* (1897-1903). See *La Rampe illustré*, 3 February 1890, *Le Guide musicale*, 1897, 642, and *Le Ménestrel*, 23 August 1929. See also Pasler, *Writing through Music*, 436.

<sup>28</sup> The temporal markers are a menuet, gavotte, while the local color is the saltarello. All of this expands the space of the stage by coming from offstage. Act II also teases that Floria will actually sing a cantata; she makes a gesture to begin singing (raising her score to sing) but is interrupted at precisely the right moment by a royal messenger.

<sup>29</sup> This was reported in many Parisian and international newspapers; Frimousse in *Le Gaulois* has a particularly funny account of Pierre Berton (the first Scarpia) making several attempts to announce the name of the author, only to be drowned out by repeated shouts of “Sarah!” See “*La Soirée Parisienne*, *Le Gaulois*, 25 November 1887.

<sup>30</sup> “Mais c’est que l’actrice, c’est le drame lui-même... impossible donc de séparer l’auteur de l’artiste ni l’artiste de l’auteur,” *L’univers illustré*, 3 December 1887. This was echoed by an actress in Bernhardt’s company who noted that in rehearsal it was difficult to tell who had written *La Tosca* and who was performing it.

<sup>31</sup> Interim, “Son souci manifeste, à lui, dans cette saisissante démonstration qu’il vient nous faire une fois de plus de son habileté infinie conquérir tout vit le spectateur, c’est la création d’un personnage dans les veines duquel sa tragédienne Mme Sarah Bernhardt transfuse tout son sang, par les yeux duquel elle verse toutes ses larmes et dont les nerfs soient ses nerfs. Comme adaptation d’un rôle aux moyens de l’artiste chargée de l’interpréter, comme moulage d’un visage par un masque, en vérité, cette *Tosca*, n’en déplaît aux autres mérites qu’elle peut avoir, est un pur chef-d’œuvre.” *Le Gaulois*, 25 November 1887. I’m not sure about this mask part.

<sup>32</sup> (tailleur pour étoiles). Pierre Véron, “Pour être exacte en sa formule, l’acteur chargé de l’annonce finale aurait dû dire: “Messieurs, la pièce que nous avons eu l’honneur de représenter devant vous est de tout le monde. Le succès est de Mme Sarah Bernhardt. Quant à M. Sardou, qui n’a fait là qu’une besogne d’adaptateur ajustant un rôle sur mesure, il a droit à une qualification nouvelle. Il n’est plus auteur dramatique. Le voilà tailleur pour étoiles,” *Le Charivari*.

<sup>33</sup> Sarcey, “Il résultait de là qu’il fallait imaginer une action d’où fussent bannis tous les développements psychologiques, qui mettent en jeu les longues conversations, les monologues, les tirades, toutes superfluités qui, outre qu’elles sont épuisantes pour l’actrice, n’auraient peut-être pas l’heur de plaire à des Yankees non plus qu’à des Malais ou à des Cochinchinois. Des faits rien que des faits, et de gros faits, qui ! crèvent les yeux et qui émeuvent la sensibilité physique. Ce n’est pas tout: ces publics internationaux sont fous de beaux spectacles. Il fallait donc que cette action, pour rapide et brutale qu’elle fût, servît de prétexte à de luxueuses mises en scène, et qu’elles ne fussent pourtant pas assez essentielles au drame pour qu’il ne fût pas possible, le cas échéant, de les supprimer ou de les raccourcir ou de les modifier,” *Le Temps*, 28 November 1887.

<sup>34</sup> Fouquier plays with the earlier connotation of the medieval epic “chanson de geste,” writing: “A cet art, il sacrifie, de parti pris, les développements d’ordre psychique, seulement indiqués, et même le style. Pour mieux dire, il veut avoir un style particulier, où chaque mot est, pour ainsi parler, le prétexte d’un jeu de scène, d’un geste, d’une action : c’est la chanson de geste, dirai-je, en dénaturant le sens du mot primitif. Il ne se défend pas de ce parti-pris. Et c’est le louer, je suppose, comme il veut l’être que d’admirer, dans la *Tosca* même, l’art du décorateur qu’il a inspiré et réglé,” *Le XIX Siècle*, 26 November 1887.

<sup>35</sup> Fouquier, “Une faiblesse — il faut tout dire — de l’art dramatique conçu de cette façon, c’est qu’il faut une interprétation pour ainsi dire adéquate à la composition. L’auteur ne voit pas ses personnages d’une façon abstraite, ce qui leur enlève un peu de leur grandeur; il les voit incarnés déjà dans l’acteur qui doit les jouer, ce qui ajoute à leur vie et fournit des éléments de pittoresque très particuliers,” *Le XIX Siècle*, 26 November 1887.

<sup>36</sup> QUOTE SOURCE. Other critics such as Adrien Bernheim in *Le Nation* noted Act II was simply a mise en scène, even if a superior one. 1887?

<sup>37</sup> There was some praise for Bernhardt’s “sated rage” of the triple imprecation of “Meurs! Meurs! Meurs” in Act IV and the celebrated stage whisper in Act V.

Lemaître, “Rien, rien que des gestes fous et des cris. Toute beauté de forme et d’expression était impossible. Et, d’ailleurs, qui l’eût saisie? Peu importe ce que dit la *Tosca*; nous ne faisons pas plus attention qu’elle aux mots qu’elle emploie. Les mots, elle pourrait s’en passer, nous ne les entendons pas. La situation étant donnée, n’importe qui eût pu écrire la scène, et n’importe comment. Ce qu’éprouve la *Tosca* est si violent et si simple que cela ne se peut exprimer que par des cris, des gémissements, des hurlements, des rugissements, des sanglots,—ou même uniquement par des gestes, des mains tordues, des cheveux dénoués, des genoux traînés par terre,—ou même par rien, par le silence immobile de Niobé,” *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 28 November 1887. See also Emile Faguet, *La France*, date?.

<sup>38</sup> The genesis of *Tosca* is complicated by inaccuracies. Much of my information is based on Deborah Burton’s article “The Creation of *Tosca*,” 27-34. Other sources which detail differences between Sardou’s play and Puccini’s opera include *Tosca’s Prism: Three Moments of Western Cultural History*; Susan Vandiver Nicassio’s *Tosca’s Rome*; Gérard Loubinoux, “Les avatars de *Tosca* entre France et Italie,” 141-159.

<sup>39</sup> These included Sardou's worries over Puccini's financial viability as a composer and growing dissatisfaction on Puccini's part with Tosca's subject matter. The project was totally off the rails by November 1893, and by July 1894 composer Alberto Franchetti (1860-1942) was formally contracted to set Illica's libretto. At a private reading of the libretto in Paris in October 1894 the elderly Verdi allegedly yearned to set Tosca as well. Franchetti gave up on the project by May 1895, however, and during the summer of 1895 Puccini once again agreed to set Illica's Tosca. Deborah Burton, "An Analysis of Puccini's Tosca: A Heuristic Approach to the Unifying Elements of the Opera," 428.

<sup>40</sup> He thought the libretto was better than Sardou's original, and was unimpressed with Bernhardt's performance, writing:

I was in Florence at Tosca, which I found very much inferior to yours. The element of pathetic love (lyric) abounds in the Italian adaptation, but is lacking in the French. I did not like Sarah very much. Is fatigue getting to her? Neither did it make much impression on the audience. But in Milan, eh?! Gara, no. 143, 131, cited in Michele Girardi, Puccini, 149.

<sup>41</sup> Giacosa traveled to the United States in 1891 to rehearse the play with her. During his trip, he attended some of Bernhardt's performances, including a farcically abbreviated version of La Tosca, which he later described in his memoir *Impressioni d'America*. Giacosa, *Impressioni d'America*, 115.

<sup>42</sup> See May 7 letter to Ricordi for details on the 1889 performance. Puccini told his friend Fraccaroli that though he had understood little on that occasion, he had been especially moved by the anguish with which Bernhardt repeated in an undertone, "Malheureuse! Malheureuse!"

Puccini writes to his brother-in-law in Sept. 1895: Dear Beppe, [Puccini's brother-in-law, Giuseppe Razzi, who lived in Florence. He was the husband of Elvira's sister Ida]. "On October the ninth, Sarah Bernhardt is in Florence performing as Tosca, and Elvira and I will come to Florence for only that night...Reply soon soon soon. Would you be able to say where Mrs Bernhardt acts--I imagine it will be at the Niccolini [the name of a theatre in Florence]. Also give me your usual address in case I need to telegraph you to book the seats." Signed, "Farewell I send you this letter by means of M[aestro] Mugnone [Leopoldo, Italian conductor]. Affectionately yours GP" See David Schulson autographs for the letter. <http://www.schulsonautographs.com/shop/schulson/492.html>

Letter to Illica (?) in 1895: "After I was in Florence at Tosca, which I found very much inferior to yours. The element of pathetic love (lyric) abounds in the Italian adaptation, but is lacking in the French. I did not like Sarah very much. Is fatigue getting to her? Neither did it make much impression on the audience. But in Milan, eh?" Gara, no. 143, 131, translated in Michele Girardi, Puccini, 149.

Ricordi answered Puccini's letter and wrote: "A Milano il dramma ha fatto immenso effetto, e la Bernhardt fu splendida, specie nella scena della tortura: è partita però mezz'ammalata, e questo mi spiega come non abbia potuto ottenere tutto l'effetto a Firenze." (Gara, p. 129)

<sup>43</sup> Giacosa had revised a play for Bernhardt and traveled with her company for several weeks in 1891. While working on the opera libretto,

<sup>44</sup> You might consider Manon Lescaut's period dances to La Fanciulla's pistol shots and wind machine to Il Tabarro's car horns and river boat whistles.

<sup>45</sup> In Puccini, there is a wide, varied (and under-studied) space between singing and speaking. He often uses the designations “parlato” and “quasi-parlato,” performance indications which often accompany vocal effects which are fully notated in pitch and rhythm. At times, however, Puccini does use these two designations with a notational style which indicates rhythm more precisely than pitch (most typically in Puccini this is a pitchless note head, sometimes accompanied by an accent or a straight line). Does the height indicate a general register? Puccini also utilizes a number of other speech-like elements, including his frequent descriptive “gridando/grido” (shouted). These gridi come in a variety of notational schemes, from fully notated to pitchless stems lacking noteheads. In this same family is the designation “urlando” (screamed)—less common than grido/gridando, but still occurring in a variety of notations from full notation to pitchless stems. Sometimes with gridando, they begin more precisely notated and then transition to more and more unnotated (from precise rhythm with no pitch to the “designation” of the words merely under the staff)

Much has been written on screaming in opera, particular post-verismo and expressionist screams. Freidheim wrote: “Probably the most famous non-German example occurs in Act II of *Tosca*. There, the reader may remember, Mario is being tortured offstage; what we hear are actual cries of pain. These cries add to a particularly vivid form of verismo, but although the effect is striking, indeed sensational, it is not emotionally revealing. Thus, while all of these cries may remain startling, or even chilling in a good performance, they are categorically different from those of Wagner. Wagner’s screams never reflect physical pain, but rather the release of pent-up emotion in a sudden outburst.” Yet I would argue Mario’s screams (and *Tosca*’s?) come directly from the (hotly-debated) soundworld of the play, not an aesthetic innovation of Puccini’s.

<sup>46</sup> Puccini had changed the lines from Sardou’s source text, which read, “et c’est devant ça que tremblait toute une ville.”

<sup>47</sup> Ugo Ojetti, *Cose viste*, ii (Milan: 1923), 122. Cited in Wilson, *Turandot* article, p. 444.

<sup>48</sup> Critics generally praised the love scenes, the religious pageantry and isolated lyrical moments of the score.

<sup>49</sup> Pierre Lalo, “Que la pensée ait pu venir à un musicien de mettre en musique un ouvrage de cette nature, c’est un événement qui confond. Il n’y a rien là qui puisse convenir à la musique; mieux, tout y répugne, la repousse et l’exclut. Cet enchevêtrement de ressorts mélodramatiques, cette accumulation de faits atroces et brutaux, cette exhibition, cet étalage, cette représentation matérielle de la souffrance physique qui est la raison d’être de la pièce, sont exactement les sortes de choses où la musique a le moins à faire. *La Tosca* ne contient ni sentiments, ni passions, ni âmes, ni caractères, rien en un mot de ce qui constitue l’essence du lyrisme musical,” *Le Temps*, 20 October 1903.

<sup>50</sup> “When the composer most wishes to be intense, there is little save irritating noise—much sound with little musical sense. This remark applies chiefly to the second act. There are some who say they best enjoy Wagner’s music at the theatre by shutting their eyes and not being worried by what is taking place on stage. In the second act of *La Tosca*, on the contrary, it is the sound of the music that seems to interfere with the undoubtedly strong dramatic situation. Is the scene in which Cavaradossi is tortured physically and *La Tosca* morally one which lends itself to musical treatment? This is a difficult question to answer, but this much we say—Signor Puccini has not, in our opinion, intensified it by his art.” London, *The Atheneum*, 21 July 1900.

<sup>51</sup> *Evening Dispatch*, 23 May 1917, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> as did R.A. Streatfield in the first edition of *Grove*

<sup>53</sup> Runciman, *The Saturday Review* (14 July 1900). Thompson made similar comments about *Tosca* for many years in his capacity as critic of the *Yorkshire Post* and *Leeds Intelligencer*. See 6 Dec 1918, then 1926, 1932, 1933. Thompson did praise Puccini’s skill in fitting music to the drama, however little the drama and music were to Thompson’s taste.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.operabase.com/statistics/en> Specifically, 993 productions and 3,657 performances. The other top performers were *La Traviata*, *Magic Flute*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*.

<sup>55</sup> Bergeron, *Voice Lessons*, xii. I should note that Bernhardt herself attended to the performance styles of singers. She told May Agate that Pauline Viardot was “the finest actress she had ever seen—watching her perform had been ‘her greatest experience as a spectator in the theatre.’ She likewise greatly admired the acting talents of Italian soprano Gemma Bellincioni (1864-1950)—they even contemplated a theatrical season together.

<sup>56</sup> Many singers recalled meeting her vividly in their memoirs. See bibliography for a list of singer's memoirs. Singers' memoirs flourished as a genre during the late nineteenth century through the golden age of opera recording, and had strong quasi-novelistic genre conventions. These memoirs are often exaggerated renditions which read more like hagiographic press accounts—this does not invalidate their importance but merely serves as a caution. For a gendered reading of selected female opera singers and their autobiographies, see Susan J. Leonardi and Rebecca A. Pope's *The Diva's Mouth: Body, Voice, Prima Donna Politics*.

<sup>57</sup> Melba, *Melodies and memories*, 61.

<sup>58</sup> See "The Permanence of Sarah Bernhardt's influence," *The Sun*: New York, 18 December 1910. Eames remembered forty years later that "the thrill of that night remained with me after all those years."

<sup>59</sup> Farrar, interview with J.B. Kennedy, "I Have Lived as I liked." *Collier's*, *The National Weekly*, 9 April, 1927, 40. The reference in this interview is somewhat perplexing—the "rôle" mentioned is Zaza. Farrar indeed appeared in this opera, but much later in her career (1920), and Zaza was originally a vehicle for Gabrielle Réjane, not a role that Sarah Bernhardt ever acted on stage. It is more likely that this anecdote of Farrar's (if accurate) relates to her coaching of Tosca with Bernhardt in 1909 (see below).

Geraldine Farrar, no title, no publication, Atlanta, GA, 4 May 1910, n.pg. included in Scrapbook No. 28, Scrapbook, 1910-1930, Library of Congress Geraldine Farrar Collection. Farrar claims she greatly admired Bernhardt's use of a Gothic chair in Act I and "adopted this departure for my own assumption of the role." See Farrar, *Such Sweet Compulsion*, 254.

Geraldine Farrar, no title, no publication, Atlanta, GA, 4 May 1910, n.pg. included in Scrapbook No. 28, Scrapbook, 1910-1930, Library of Congress Geraldine Farrar Collection. Cited in Nash, *Always First Class*, 103.

<sup>60</sup> Mercedes Viale Ferrero notes that publishers such as Ricordi generally chose artists to design costumes, props and sets for operatic premieres; this initial mise-en-scène was frequently rented to later performances, "thus taking on a canonical function." She hypothesizes that the Roman premiere costume designer, Adolf Hohenstein, likely modeled his designs directly on published engravings from the 1887 *la Tosca* production.<sup>1</sup>

She cites the French periodical *Les Premières illustrées* in 1887, although there were a number of publications with accounts of the *La Tosca* costumes, such as the *Bibliographie de la France: ou Journal générale de l'imprimerie et de...* (Oct 1887). I don't know whether this is right. See Ferrero, p. 24.

<sup>61</sup> Le Guin's "reciprocal relationship" focuses on the composer who is no longer living, but in the case of (like Boccherini's sonatas) a part written for Bernhardt to play (even semi-authored by her), this carnal knowledge and experience through the medium of the tactile forged an embodied lineage for sopranos with the (not yet dead) Bernhardt.

<sup>62</sup> Flat, "Nous avons très présente encore à la mémoire l'intensité de certaines scènes de *la Tosca*, telle que la jouait Mme Sarah Bernhardt," *Revue politique et littéraire*, 31 October 1903.

<sup>63</sup> 26 March 1905, *The Sun*, "When I was being treated in Paris last winter by that wonderful doctor, Gauthier, I had plenty of time to work with the role and to think only of Tosca and what I might do artistically the next time I sang the part. That opportunity came and I organized the charity performance at the Opéra-Comique in Paris in October. It was a courageous thing to play that role in Paris, where Sarah Bernhardt had acted it first."

<sup>64</sup> "Habillée sans génie,—mais elle avait à lutter contre le souvenir délicieux de Sarah Bernhardt, pareille, des fleurs entres le bras, à une Madone-déesse qui rentrerait chez elle dans une église païenne." *Le Journal*, Paris, 15 October 1903, p. 5. The literal recycling of Bernhardt's Act I costume faded very gradually; in 1921 Oscar Thompson noted Maria Jeritza's Act I appearance included neither bonnet nor staff<sup>1</sup>, but certain singers—such as Renata Tebaldi—still appeared with the traditional Bernhardt cane, feathered hat, and arm bouquet as late as the 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

Musical America. <http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/scripts/cgiip.exe/WService=BibSpeed/fullcit.w?xCID=79220&limit=500&xBranch=ALL&xstartdate=&xenddate=&xterm=1921-22&x=0&xhomepath=&xhome=2> See the Sedge LeBlang photograph of Tebaldi in the revised Metropolitan Opera production of 1955-1956. <http://archives.metoperafamily.org/Imgs/TebaldiTosca.jpg>

Although Tebaldi's dress is now black, the other traditional elements are present.

<sup>65</sup> Dundee Evening Telegraph, 8 May 1913, p. 6.

Melba was rumored to appear as Tosca for more than a decade; while she recorded excerpts from the opera, she never appeared on stage as Tosca.

<sup>66</sup> This was done again in Munich in 2019 and still flopped: “Bad productions never die, or so it seems; like pesticides, even if they’re banned in the U.S., they continue to do their damage abroad. Thus does Luc Bondy’s production of Tosca, which was finally rooted out from the Met after multiple dismaying runs, continue to desecrate Puccini and Illica’s three-act melodrama Tosca at Bayerische Staatsoper “in Kooperation mit der Metropolitan Opera New York und dem Teatro alla Scala, Mailand.”

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/2009/10/13/puccini-tosca-metropolitan-opera-luc-bondy-opinions-contributors-judith-h-dobrzynski.html?sh=7f70650c7bf8>

<sup>68</sup> Feb 15, 2017. <https://apnews.com/arts-and-entertainment-music-09a4652b4973488485bc582737a7125a>