

EPOA does bloody Puccini melodrama

When the word "opera" enters a conversation, most, if not all, of the participants avert their faces and groan loudly. For most people, in fact, if there is one thing truer than another, it is that opera is boring and incomprehensible.

If this happens to be your problem, I strongly urge you to attend the Edmonton Professional Opera Association's upcoming production of Puccini's *Tosca*. Because whatever its defects are, a listless plot is not among them.

To begin with, the protagonists are (in order of appearance) a patriot-painter-lover, Mario Cavaradossi; a jealous prima-donna, Floria Tosca; and an unbelievably evil, insidious, depraved and lecherous Chief of Police, Baron Scarpia. There is also a comic sacristan and a nameless shepherd. The plot includes two murders and a suicide, as well as an unspecified number of political killings.

Mario is painting a portrait of the Virgin Mary in a church as the scene opens. In rushes Angelotti, a political refugee whom I forgot to mention but who doesn't matter as he gets killed off anyway. Angelotti appeals to Mario for help, and Cavaradossi thereupon shows him to a convenient well in which he can hide himself. (Angelotti never appears again.) After seeing Angelotti safely down the well, Mario happily launches into a lyric aria in praise of Tosca, using as an excuse the fact that the Virgin Mary's hair is blonde and Tosca's black.

Enter Tosca; the inevitable love-duet follows. Finally, after interminable mutual rhapsodizing, Mario leaves, and the stage is set for the **EVIL BARON SCARPIA!!!**

Scarpia is by far the most interesting and loveable character in the opera, and we can tell the minute we see him that he is going to be

a lot of fun. He starts off by lecherously eyeing Tosca, and then suspiciously eyeing the church (Scarpia is always suspicious of something).

After a long and tortuous dialogue with Scarpia, Tosca leaves for the opera (talk about a play within a play). Scarpia thereupon performs one of the most technically brilliant things in all of opera: he sings simultaneously of his love for Tosca and his love for God. It's a really archetypal study of the confusion of sexual and religious impulses, and is the best thing in the opera.

The second act is even more horrifying. In it, Mario is tortured by the police, Tosca spills the beans about Angelotti, is propositioned by Scarpia (one of the great blackmail artists of all time), barter a promise to do shameful things with Scarpia for what later turns out to be a fake reprieve of Mario's death sentence, and finally murders Scarpia with a bread knife, laying him out picturesquely on the stage, and making a Christ-figure of him.

The last act is almost an anticlimax. Mario laments long, loud and lyrical on his being too young to die, sings another duet with Tosca, and is dispatched well and truly by Scarpia's fake - but - not - really - a - fake execution. Tosca, upon discovering the Horrible Truth (we knew it all the time) jumps off the nearest battlement, shouting insults at Scarpia as she goes. Curtain.

A lot of music is consistent with the plot—loud and shallow. But on the other hand there are a number of truly dramatic moments (Scarpia's motif, parts of the first-act love duet, the whole of Scarpia's scene in the church, the whole of the Scarpia-Tosca scene, and a good deal of the last act). In fact,



HEARTBURN?—Actually this is a picture of Enzo Sordello (who will play in the upcoming EPOA production of *Tosca*) as Zurga in Bizet's opera *The Pearl Fishers*. If you think he looks terrifying (or terrified) here, just wait till you see him as the wicked Baron Scarpia in *Tosca*.

the whole affair is intensely and for the most part effectively theatrical. And anything that isn't really good is camp.

True to its recently established policy, the EPOA is importing three middle-name artists to take the three chief roles. Enzo Sordello, who has sung most of the major baritone roles at the Met and La Scala, will play Scarpia.

Maria di Gerlando, the Violetta of the EPOA's *Traviata* last year, returns to this land of smiles to do *Tosca*.

The luckless Cavaradossi will be played by tenor Baldo dal Ponte

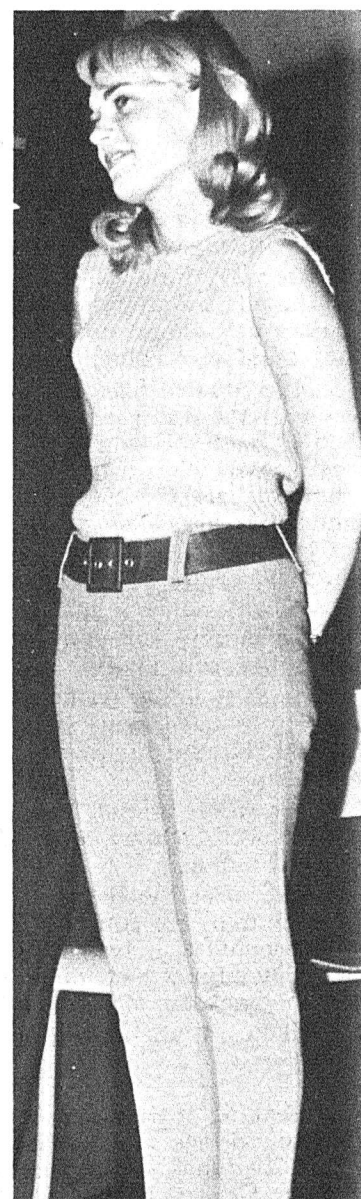
from San Francisco. And the most important person of all (the conductor, in case you didn't guess) will be Richard Karp, about whom a lot of people have raved.

So on October 21 (this Friday) the happy Jubilee Auditorium will again be thronged with happy people wearing happy formal gowns and tuxedos and all of them quite oblivious to what will be taking place on stage. (To find the real music-lover you must go to the paper-shoed, rag-clad horde of motleys in the second balcony.)

And the real point is that opera comes but three or four times a

year in Edmonton, and that it is therefore the duty of every right-thinking, Christian, socialist, anti-imperialist, reactionary, progressive, atheistical, patriotic one of you to dash down to Heintzman's and get tickets to *Tosca* right away.

—Bill Beard



—Lyll photo

You may wonder what this girl is doing on the Arts Page. Probably she is too.

—Joe Zelyas

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Sci-fi goes psycho

To judge by the average Hot Caf conversation, most people think of science fiction as a polymorphous agglomeration of spacemen, spaceships, robots, BEMs (Bug-Eyed Monsters), alien worlds, and fantastic adventures.

There was a time when I too was prey to this heresy. But the fact is that good science fiction has a relevance above and beyond the particular far-fetched story it has to tell; and that its themes are as universal (no pun) as the average "respectable" novel's.

In *The Quality of Mercy*, by D. G. Compton, the setting is Britain in 1979, and more specifically, an Anglo-American air-base project.

An agreement has been reached among the British, American, Russian and Chinese governments to make the world a better place to live in by eliminating a large segment of its population. The method for doing this involves an interesting and not-too-implausible idea.

The plan is carried out by duping most of the military. Inevitably, a leak occurs, and a member of the team which is to help implement the plan becomes aware of the real nature of the project.

Is he worried? Not on your life. He is completely unable to perceive any ethical or moral problem in the scheme.

The novel thus presents two questions, one ethical and the other socio-psychological. (Pardon me.)

The ethical problem is solved easily enough, because we are all good little liberals, but to the other there is no answer. Very depressing.

But if you really don't like hang-ups, the book to read is Jack Williamson's *The Humanoids*. Its problem (modestly put) is the salvation of mankind.

In *The Humanoids* we see a galaxy which has been conquered by man but not held by him. Throughout the galaxy its inhabitants are unconsciously rebuilding an old and fragmented civilization, and are doing it precisely along the same lines that led to its fall (little do they know).

Behind all this there exists a little known operative law which states that in every progressing civilization there comes a stage in which that civilization's technical power vastly exceeds its social maturity, and that the race will therefore destroy itself. (Sound familiar?) Thus many of the galaxy's planets are about to annihilate themselves.

Enter a genius with a solution to the problem: an artificial race of humanoids who have been programmed to protect men from themselves.

The solution is put into operation, and the results constitute most of the novel. With the advent of the robot, the old question of who will control the controllers is answered: the control is built in.

Although these two novels are not precisely representative of current science fiction, they do exemplify a trend within it to deal with broad but relevant problems in what is an off-beat but certainly entertaining way.