

# LOS ANGELES DOWNTOWN NEWS

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## **Blood, Passion and the Soprano Why Adrienne Pieczonka Gets Emotional Over Puccini's Cinematic 'Tosca'**

by Julie Riggott

Floria Tosca is no shrinking violet. For Adrienne Pieczonka, that makes performing as the heroine of Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* a rare thrill.

"I haven't done very much Puccini in my repertoire," said the soprano on a recent day off from rehearsals at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. "I've done a lot of Mozart, Wagner and Strauss, a bit of Verdi. In a lot of the Wagner operas, I'm sort of the long-suffering good girl, very chaste, very wholesome, the woman that's done wrong or often gets murdered.

"Here I kill myself at the end, but it's different. I wreak vengeance. It's exciting."

Puccini's thriller of political corruption, blackmail, murder and deception opens Saturday, May 17. The L.A. Opera production, which has 10 performances, continues through June 21. Pieczonka sings the title role in six of those.

The work debuted in Rome in 1900, but given its cinematic dimensions, it's not surprising *Tosca* remains one of the world's most popular operas.

"It's a love story with a twist," Pieczonka said.

When her lover, Cavaradossi (played by Neil Shicoff opposite Pieczonka), harbors a political fugitive and is arrested by corrupt police chief Scarpia (Juan Pons), Tosca makes a deal with him to save Cavaradossi's life. But the story ends tragically when Tosca murders Scarpia and then discovers she was deceived.

"It's so visceral; it has blood and passion," Pieczonka said. Sinking my teeth into that, and the fact that I have to murder this evil man and the whole challenge as an actor is fun. It's kind of exciting actually to act that much. I'm really getting a buzz from it."

That sense of excitement also played a bit on Pieczonka's nerves, as the Downtown Los Angeles production marks her debut as Tosca.

"I'm terribly nervous," she admitted. "I've dreamt of doing this role, and now that I'm doing it, it's very exciting - a bit of nerves, lots of adrenaline. My plan is to just keep breathing."

The Canadian native shouldn't have a problem with the new role. Despite her youthful appearance, she has had a 20-year career that took her to London for 12 years (where she might have picked up that subtle accent) and Vienna for six, where she became something of an expert in Austrian and German operas. She received the highest compliment as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* (which has become her signature role) at Bayreuth, the annual Wagner festival in Germany.

"That's the mecca for Wagner singers, and I think I've had the greatest success of my life singing there," Pieczonka said. "I came up for my curtain call and there was just this wall of sound.... It blew me away. It was a real highlight of my life."

For Pieczonka, the opera of the moment is always her favorite. Right now, the high emotional stakes of *Tosca* are providing plenty of excitement and challenge.

Talking about Scarpia, who tricks Tosca into believing he will free her husband in return for sexual favors, Pieczonka said, "The bad guy is just so evil. I think probably Scarpia is one of the most evil characters I've encountered."

In rehearsals with Pons, Pieczonka was seriously shaken. "When we staged that scene where he tries to seduce me and I end up killing him, I went home after rehearsal and I was very upset," she said.

Given the intensity of the part, Pieczonka planned accordingly for her day off.

"I'm going to go get a massage," she said. "I need one, a bit of pampering."

*Tosca runs May 17-June 21. Pieczonka plays Tosca on May 17, 21, 25 and 31 and June 4 and 8. Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 135 N. Grand Ave., (213) 972-8001 or laopera.com.*