

# Puccini Tosca (Highlights)



Georges Prêtre is one of the leading conductors of the last half of the twentieth century, especially known for operatic conducting and performances of French music. He studied trumpet as a boy, graduating from the Douai Conservatory. Nazi occupation of Paris did not substantially interfere with the teaching activities of the famous Paris Conservatory, where Prêtre continued his musical studies. He took First Prize in trumpet in 1944 and studied harmony with Henri Challan and Maurice Duruflé. He began studying conducting with André Cluytens, Pierre Dervaux, and Richard Blareau. His conducting debut was in operetta, a fact that eluded biographers since he used the assumed name of Georges Dherain. His official conducting debut was at the Marseilles Opera in 1946, in Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys*. He spent a decade primarily in provincial French opera houses: Marseilles (1946-1948), Lille (1948), Casablanca (1949-1951) and Toulouse (1951-1955). He was appointed music director of the Opéra-Comique in Paris in 1956, debuting with Richard Strauss' *Capriccio* and conducting a wide variety of repertory there. He made his American conducting debut at the Chicago Lyric Opera in 1958. By 1960, he had become well-known and was selected by composer Francis Poulenc, who selected Prêtre to conduct the premiere of *Le voix humaine* (1959) and was highly esteemed for his performances of Poulenc's full length opera *Dialogues de Carmelites*. He also led the premiere of the *Sept répons des ténèbres* (1963).

In 1959, he joined the staff of the Paris Opéra, becoming music director in 1966. He debuted at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (1961), the Metropolitan Opera in New York (1965), and La Scala (1965). During this period he became a conductor often requested by opera super-star Maria Callas. He frequently returned to the Met and La Scala, especially known for his French repertory.

His concert conducting career also advanced during this period. Over the years he conducted most of the important orchestras of Europe and America, and in 1962 was appointed deputy director of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1971, the Paris Opera's periodic political problems erupted into a huge backstage dispute that closed the Opéra for several months, during which Prêtre left the company.

Since that painful experience, Prêtre most frequently has worked outside of France. He became principal guest conductor of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra in 1986, holding that post through 1991, when he was named one of its honorary conductors for life. In 1995, he became artistic director and principal conductor of the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra. Among his world premieres are *Symphony No. 4* by Marcel Landowski (1988) and *Concerto for 15 Soloists and Orchestra* by Françaix (1990).

In 1999, he conducted a major series of concerts in Paris in honor of the 100th Anniversary of Poulenc's birth.

# Callas Bergonzi Gobbi

Paris National Opera Chorus  
Orchestre de la Societe Des  
Concerts Symphonique De Paris  
Georges Prêtre



The "Maria Callas legend" has become an entity unto itself. But it is based on a monumental musical personality, a true artist in her selected domain. Her vocal artistry was unique from that first moment in Lawrence Kelly's living room: it really was he, as one of the Chicago Lyric's founding triumvirate, who lobbied for Callas to be their debut-season diva, whereas Renata Tebaldi was Cassidy's candidate. Callas' vocal artistry has remained unique in my experience ever since, not that it was always beautiful - indeed the sound could be outright ugly on numerous later occasions - but because it projected a glowing and infallible musicianship by the most instinctive actress seen onstage in more than 60 years of theater-going. Her characterizations were so vivid that, after we'd visited a few times, I came to believe she was reincarnated without much time-off between lives.

It's common to talk about the 1953 de Sabata recording at the expense of this one. I would not do without either. This one has several advantages: Though Callas' voice has not its previous resonance and control, her slimmed-down physical state makes for a more resilient vocal line. I like both, but if you prefer thin Callas, this is the Tosca for you. This is a more histrionic TOSCA -- that doesn't make it better or worse, but it's definitely different enough to set it apart. Her Vissi D'arte is her best, ever, and she recorded it many times. The stereo sound is gorgeous. While I prefer De Stefano in the lead, Bergonzi brings something special to this, too. Gobbi, in the

spirit of this production, pulls out the dramatic stops for his Scarpia. This is the melodramatic TOSCA, while the 1953 is the dramatic TOSCA. Two versions, each of which is great.

This 1965 Tosca has been reviled by virtually every critic, including the most fervent admirers of Maria Callas. They'll steer you to the classic 1953 recording. I have both, but find myself more often turning to this one. Callas in 1953 had a healthier and more secure voice, but if she was shrill a dozen years later, her middle register and soft notes were, to my ears, lovelier and more touching. De Sabata's feverish conducting on the mono set is a memento of a genius who made too few recordings, but Pretre gives more breadth to this opera's stately Roman lines. By the same token, Bergonzi -- that prince among tenors -- is more elegant than Di Stefano, whose robust voice matches De Sabata's conception and Maria's earlier vocal (and physical) heft. The critics say Gobbi was sub-par in '65, but for me he is still...

Gobbi. In sum, buy both if you can -- and if you like early Callas and Di Stefano, note that they were even more thrilling in Mexico City in 1952 -- but don't be surprised if you find yourself loving this neglected gem. Bergonzi and Gobbi do not disappoint and are two of the main reasons why this recording shouldn't be skipped.

I always come back to this recording. It is magical. I seek the highlights for when I don't have time to listen to the complete recording.

# Puccini Tosca (Highlights) Callas • Bergonzi • Gobbi

Paris National Opera Chorus

Orchestre de la Societe Des Concerts Symphonique De Paris / Georges Prêtre

1-Act I Dammi I Coliri!... Recondita Armonia

2-Act I Mario! Mario! Mario!... Perchè Chiuso? (Love Duet)

3-Act I Tre Sbirri... Una Carrozza (Te Deum) (Scarpia, Chorus)

4-Act II Floria! Amore... La Povera Mia Cena Fu Interrotta... Già, Mi Dicon Venal

5-Act II Vissi D'Arte, Vissi D'Amore...Sei Troppo Bella...Tosca, Finalmente Mia! (Final Scene)

6-Act III E Lucevan Le Stelle...O Dolci Mani..Amaro Sol Per Te

---

Please Note: In the interest of preserving the superb sound quality of these historic recordings, they have been preserved in their original, pristine state for maximum fidelity. Transferred from commercially released, analog reel-to-reel tapes (some of which are more than 50 years old), the recordings themselves can be subject to certain "artifacts" which are an inseparable part of the original analog recording process, such as tape "hiss" or other defects, and these may be audible on certain music tracks.

Because your CD or DVD-A was individually "burned" in order to realize superior sound quality to stamped, mass-produced versions, microscopic cosmetic blemishes may be visible. Please regard these tiny marks as evidence of the "human touch" in the care and individual attention that each and every HD TT disc receives during its very demanding manufacturing process.



For more info e-mail us:  
[admin@highdeftapetransfers.com](mailto:admin@highdeftapetransfers.com)  
or visit our website:  
[www.highdeftapetransfers.com](http://www.highdeftapetransfers.com)