

Applause Fills La Scala's Opening Night

Roberta Cutillo (December 09, 2019)



On Saturday December 7, the day of St. Ambrogio, patron saint of the city of Milan, an audience composed of prestigious figures including President Sergio Mattarella, Senator Liliana Segre, fashion designer Domenico Dolce, and even American singer, musician and author Patti Smith, gathered at the prestigious La Scala Theatre for this Opera season's opening night: a central event dedicated to the celebration of culture and its importance to society.

For the first time ever, Giacomo Puccini's "Tosca," which premiered in Rome in 1900, opened La Scala's season. It was a huge success, the most applauded in recent years, met with a 16-minute ovation. Although, the 1996 Riccardo Muti directed interpretation of Christoph Willibald Gluck's "Armide" still holds the record for the longest ovation, which lasted 20 minutes.

"We have made beautiful music, as we proved tonight," commented the theater's outgoing artistic director Alexander Pereira, who will go on to lead Florence's [Maggio Musicale Fiorentino](#) [2] starting December 16 and will be replaced by Frenchman Dominique Meyer, who has previously managed



the Paris Opera, the Lausanne Opera and more recently the Vienna State Opera.

Directed by Davide Livermore, Russian soprano Anna Netrebko masterfully took on the role of Tosca - once sung by the divine Maria Callas, - tenor Francesco Meli played her lover, Cavaradossi, and Baritone Luca Salsi was the devious Baron Scarpia. The orchestra was conducted by maestro Riccardo Chailly.

But these wonderful artists were not the only ones to receive the audience's praise. Before the show began, the room welcomed Italian President Sergio Mattarella with a warm applause and Life Senator [Liliana Segre](#) [3] was also applauded upon arriving at the theatre.

"Culture helps, in everything. As Primo Levi said, 'knowing is an absolute necessity,'" commented Segre, jokingly adding: "I've been a member for 30 years, I'm always at La Scala, soon they'll have me start coming to clean the place."

Other politicians such as the President of the Senate Maria Elisabetta Casellatias, former Prime Minister Mario Monti, culture minister Dario Franceschini, and the Mayor of Milan Giuseppe Sala, as well as journalists, designers, and other important figures were present at what is considered one of the most important cultural appointments in Italy.

Even American singer, writer and musician [Patti Smith](#) [4] was there. Answering to reporters at the theatre's entrance, she commented on the Sardine protest movement that is currently taking place across Italy. "People have the power, in Italy especially. The Sardines have the power," she said.

"It's a great celebration of Italian culture. The most important day," noted director Davide Livermore, who then added: "Few politicians have the courage to say that fascism is illegal. Nobody says it. The Italian Constitution was made by the right and by the left but they were all anti-fascist and against dictatorship. The fact that Mattarella was so widely applauded shows that we believe that the Constitution is anti-fascist, that Italy is united, and that it needs to grow."

The opening of La Scala resonated far beyond the theatre walls. The performance was live broadcasted in 36 different locations across the city of Milan, including Malpensa airport. And it was livestreamed on television and radio stations nationwide.

A very important event was held in the rotunda of the [San Vittore prison](#) [5], where a delegation of 50 detainees along with a group of politicians, magistrates and lawyers gathered to watch the show together.

Two detainees introduced the event. "This opera teaches us that we have to think deeply before making choices," one of them said, "and they must always be made with love in mind."



"The figure of Scarpia teaches us that power is not only a privilege, but also a responsibility," added another. "And, as such, it must be used correctly and not abused."

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