

# Tosca's wicked baron revels in Glyndebourne chorus of boos

Charlotte Alt

When the curtain came down after a performance of *Tosca* at Glyndebourne, the singers were greeted with enthusiastic applause. That is until Baron Scarpia, the villainous police chief in Giacomo Puccini's opera, and his two henchmen stepped on stage for their bows.

"I was surprised at the curtain calls to hear 'the baddies' being booed. Scarpia's henchmen got a small amount but Scarpia got a good deal more," said Carol Kellas, 77, who attended the performance on Saturday.

*Tosca*, a political thriller about the relationships between Rome's diva, Floria Tosca, her lover, Mario Cavaradossi, and the corrupt police chief Scarpia, is being shown at Glyndebourne, East Sussex, for the first time in the festival's 92-year history.

Kellas said: "I think the booing was intended to be good humoured, people were laughing. It was like at the pantomime, when you 'boo the baddie'. Very occasionally in the past I've heard this sort of thing but really nothing much. On Saturday night it was quite noticeable and I was a bit surprised."

But rather than being offended, Vladislav Sulimsky, who plays Scarpia in Ted Huffman's production, said he was "pleased" by the audience's "heartfelt response".

Sulimsky, 49, told *The Times*: "That's probably the best feedback an artist can receive from the audience. With Scarpia, these kinds of reactions are quite common. Maybe I would have been surprised if it had been my first time

Vladislav Sulimsky performs *Tosca* with Caitlin Gotmer



performing the role, but after around 250 performances, not any more."

Sulimsky, who was born in Belarus and was previously a soloist at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, has performed around the world including with the Staatsoper Berlin as Conte di Luna in Giuseppe Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. The baritone, who first performed at Glyndebourne five years ago, made his return to the festival as Scarpia in a production of *Tosca* set in the time of fascist Italy rather than the Napoleonic wars.

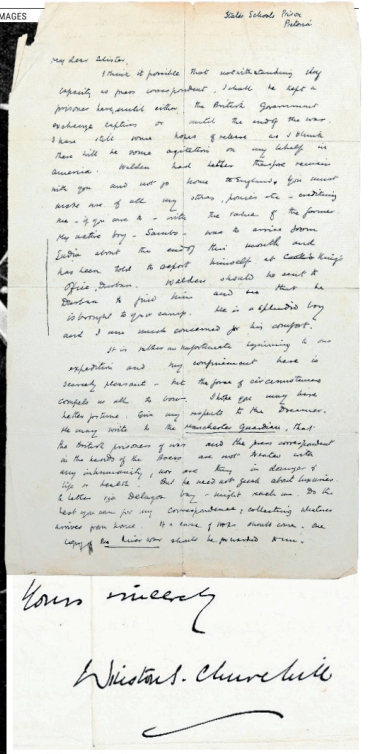
Scarpia, who has long lusted after Tosca, suspects Cavaradossi, her lover, of assisting an escaped political prisoner. He seizes this opportunity to kill two birds with one stone and manipulates Tosca into revealing the prisoner's hiding place and Cavaradossi's involvement.

"I prepare my heroes always in 100 per cent and if audiences have that reaction it's true feelings from their hearts and souls. For an actor, who is sure in himself and his job, it will never be a bad sign," Sulimsky said. He said he was not "surprised" by the reaction, having had similar experiences across the world, including in Budapest and Macau, China.

Kellas, who goes to Glyndebourne every year, worried that other singers who might not be familiar with the pantomime tradition would be taken

aback. She said: "He took it in good part but I thought really this is not something that we should be encouraging. Sounds awfully prudish to say but it's not right, even if it's meant as a joke. A singer could very well misinterpret it."

Booing villains seems to have become more common at operas. In 2017 Sir Antonio Pappano, then the music director at the Royal Opera House, said he did not mind it, saying that "pantomime booing is kind of fun". However, he disliked booing as a criticism.



## Churchill's 'remarkable' letter before jail break

The "most remarkable letter by Winston Churchill ever to be offered for sale" will return to market this month after 40 years (Jack Blackburn writes). It was written to a rival journalist in the late autumn of 1899, when Churchill was in South Africa as the war

correspondent for the *Morning Post*. In November he was on patrol with the British Army when they were ambushed. Churchill was taken prisoner and held in Pretoria.

It was from there that he wrote the letter to Captain Alister Campbell, but it gave no hint as to the tremendous act of derring-do Churchill was about to commit. On the night of December 12, when the guards were looking the other way, he jumped the prison fence. Through swamps and mines, and via stowing himself away on freight trains, Churchill made it

back to the safety of what is now Mozambique, then was taken to Durban and greeted as a hero.

In the letter Churchill, then aged 25, shows flashes of a recognisable style. "He writes well — he's a well-educated man and there's no immaturity about it," said John Ryan of Peter Harrington, a rare books specialist that will offer the letter at the Treasure House Fair in London for £75,000. "He wants to shape a narrative, but he's not writing for publication so he's not considering every word for its literary impact." Churchill began by

Winston Churchill was 25 when he was captured in the Boer War and wrote to a fellow reporter to say it was "scarcely pleasant"

writing: "It is rather an unfortunate beginning to our expedition and my confinement here is scarcely pleasant — but the force of circumstances compels us all to bow. British prisoners of war and the press correspondent in the hands of the Boers are not treated with any inhumanity, nor are they in danger of life or health. But he need not gush about luxuries."

Later in life, Churchill recalled his experiences almost with nostalgia, seeing his treatment by the Boers as from a lost era where war was conducted with decency.

The correspondence was last on the market in 1986, when Steve Forbes of *Forbes* magazine bought it at Sotherby's for \$18,330, a record for a Churchill letter.

# Want tickets to see the Tapestry? There's 16,000 ahead of you in queue

Herbie Russell

The British Museum's online booking system for tickets to view the Bayeux Tapestry has crashed amid "unprecedented" demand.

Customers reported waiting up to ten hours in queues of more than 16,000 people, with some receiving an error message when they reached the final booking page. Free tickets were made available to museum members on Tuesday before another batch, open to the general public, goes on sale in July.

The British Museum expects the tapestry, returning to the UK for the first time in 950 years, to deliver "the biggest year in the museum's history" with 75

million visitors forecast this year.

In an email sent to customers, the museum apologised for delays and said that technical teams were "urgently working to resolve the issue".

Elizabeth Norton, a Tudor-era historian and author, said that she "waited in a virtual queue for nearly four hours to book members' tickets for the Bayeux Tapestry". Norton said she then received an error message saying she had been "redirected", and was sent to the back of the line. "There are now more than 16,000 people ahead of me when I join the queue," she said.

Andrew Payne, head of education and outreach at The National Archives, said in a post on X that the queuing



The Bayeux Tapestry is expected to bring record crowds to the British Museum

system for tickets was "an absolute joke". "Over 10 hours waiting and told that the URL is invalid and the email link you sent me is not valid," he wrote. "This needs sorting!" Some customers threatened to cancel their

memberships, which cost up to £166 each year.

The British Museum has secured the 70-metre embroidered depiction of the 1066 Norman invasion and Battle of Hastings from the Bayeux Tapestry

Museum in Normandy as part of a cultural loan agreement between France and the UK.

Members reported problems after being given early access to the booking portal, where they can reserve free tickets from September 10 to December 31 this year. By yesterday they were reporting fewer delays.

The ticket portal will open to the general public from July 1. Tickets will cost £33 for adults and £25 for students while under 16s go free. A British Museum spokesman said: "Whilst a large proportion of members were able to book tickets successfully, we appreciate this wasn't everyone's experience and have apologised for the inconvenience."