



Artistic director Raimundas Banionis



Decorator Sergejus Bocullo

"Tosca" – universal things related in things a new way

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Rūta Grinevičiūtė

Lithuanian stage director Raimundas Banionis will make his debut on the international opera stage. At the end of the summer the audience of the international Dalhala festival will see his production of Giacomo Puccini's opera Tosca.


Puccini tells an eternal story about good and evil. Can good live in spite of evil and employ the armoury of evil? This story is true for every age and for every generation. Love in the cesspool of civil war. Love, which bastards of all times, the Stalins, Hitlers, Napoleons, and Scarpias, furiously fought against. They were furious because love, not guns, is the most powerful enemy of evil. On the condition that good does not grab a knife. If this happens, good and evil become equal in front of God.



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Giacomo Puccini opera

Life lies in eternal things

Stage director R. Banionis, who interpreted Tosca in the Estonian National Opera and the guest performance at Dalhala Opera Festival in Sweden, said that he did not have to follow the script very precisely to revive the storytelling about eternal things. "Who is Scarpia? Is he an evil genius, a torturer or a challenge that Tosca has to accept? Like Jesus Christ put to the test in the desert," asks the stage director, whose relationship with opera is very specific. He is a film and theatre director educated in the school of Juozas Miltinis, who required his actors to be philosophers and acrobats at the same time. Performances staged by R. Banionis differ a great deal from postmodernist productions currently predominating in Lithuania, where the actor is just a marionette in the director's hands, required not to live the role but to convey the stage director's perception of the role in the most precise manner. 



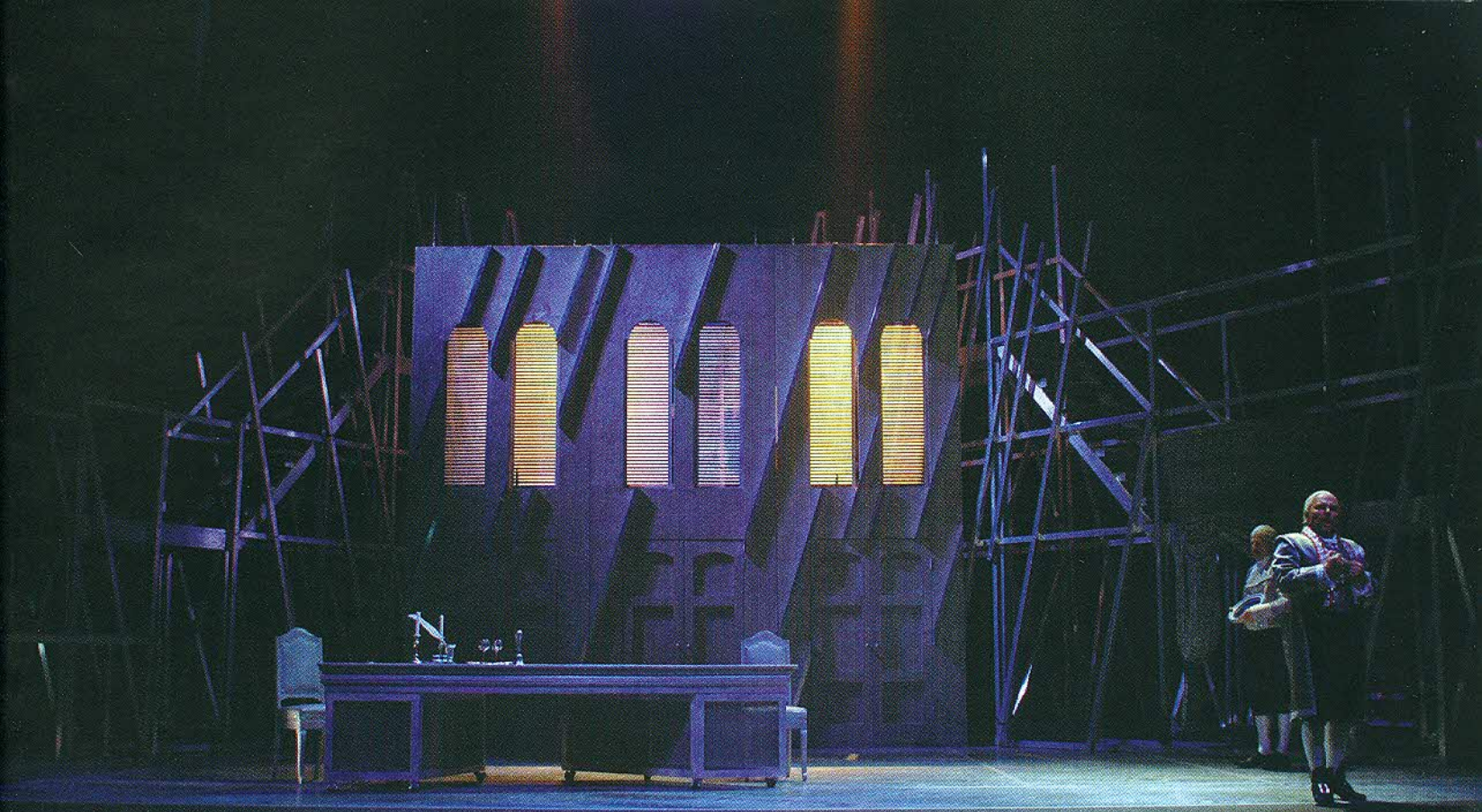
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Giacomo Puccini opera

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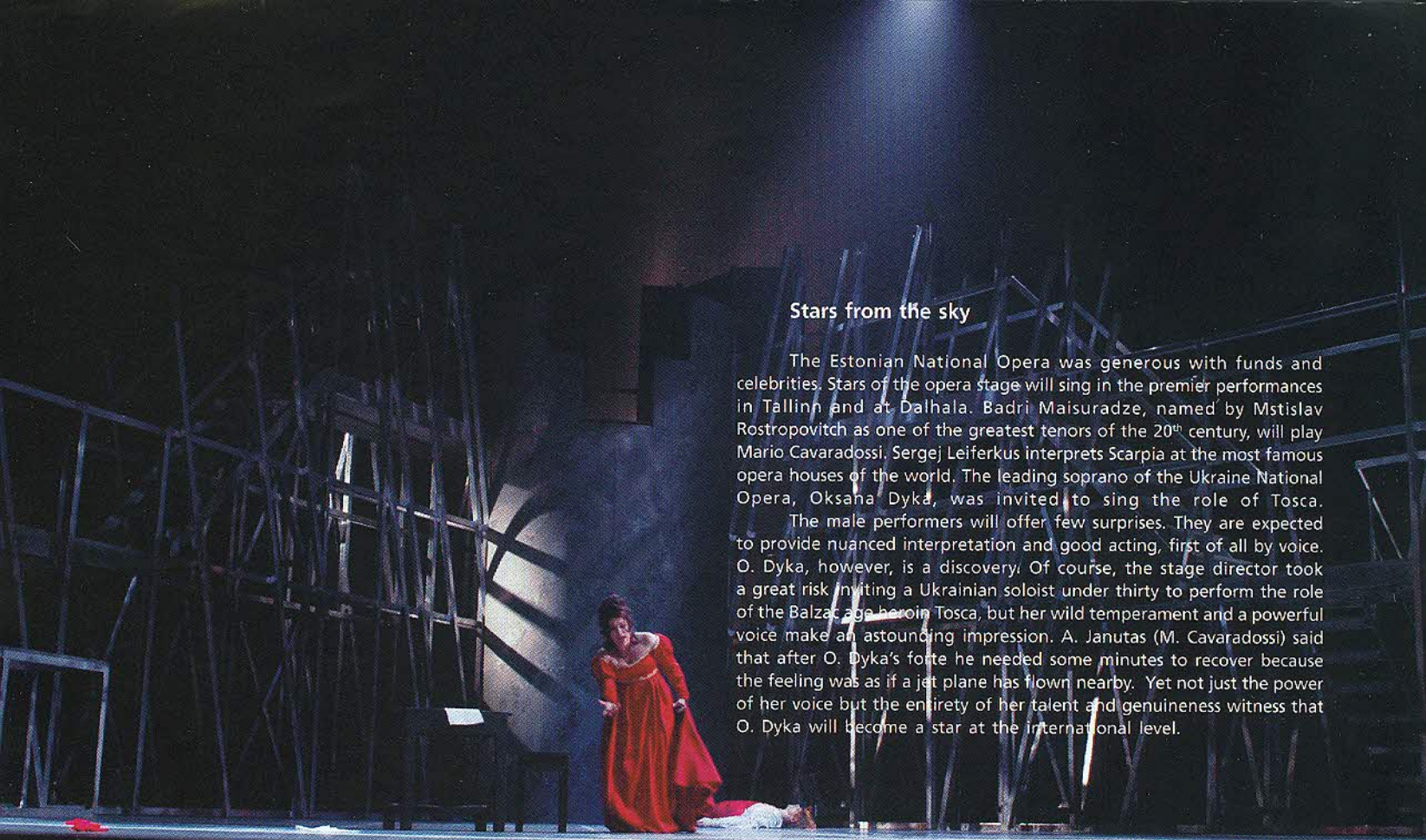
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R. Banionis creates differently. His actors are co-authors of the performance. His best theatre performances "Frank Kruk", "Encounters", and his first opera "Rigoletto" are played in packed halls. Perhaps the audience is attracted by real things, while the director insistently avoids creating impression for the sake of impression. "No effects and innovations need to be employed if the creator thinks about eternal things," R. Banionis repeats the saying of Miltinis.

The offer to stage Tosca in the Estonian National Opera came after the successful performance of Rigoletto in the Klaipėda Musical Theatre. For R. Banionis and the Lithuanian classical stage-directing school this offer is the opportunity to go international. An old team of set and costume designer Sergejus Bocullo and tenor Algirdas Janutas, who created a memorable role of the Duke in Rigoletto, are going together. The Estonian National Opera has made a deal with the Dalhala festival that Tosca will be on their stage this summer. Bravo! 





Stars from the sky

The Estonian National Opera was generous with funds and celebrities. Stars of the opera stage will sing in the premier performances in Tallinn and at Dalhala. Badri Maisuradze, named by Mstislav Rostropovitch as one of the greatest tenors of the 20th century, will play Mario Cavaradossi. Sergej Leiferkus interprets Scarpia at the most famous opera houses of the world. The leading soprano of the Ukraine National Opera, Oksana Dyka, was invited to sing the role of Tosca.

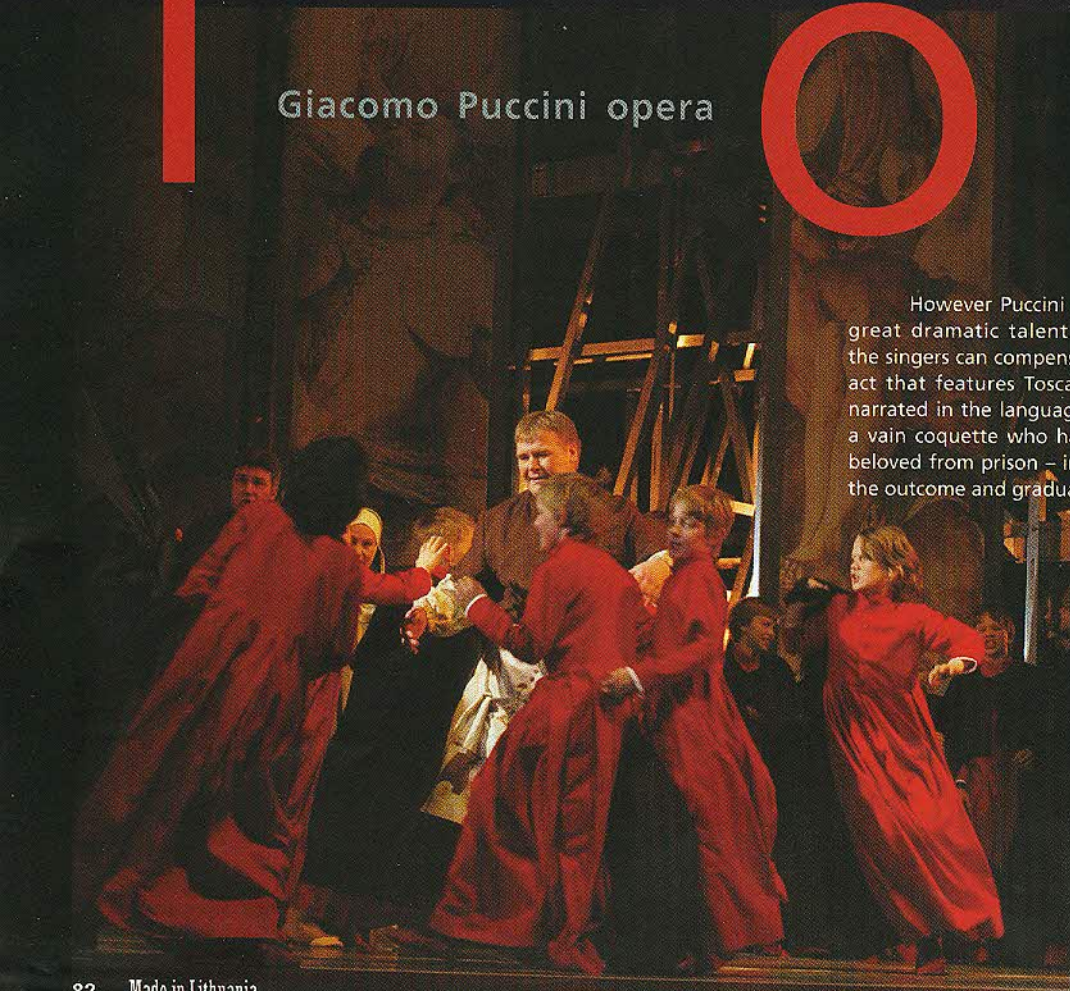
The male performers will offer few surprises. They are expected to provide nuanced interpretation and good acting, first of all by voice. O. Dyka, however, is a discovery. Of course, the stage director took a great risk inviting a Ukrainian soloist under thirty to perform the role of the Balzac age heroin Tosca, but her wild temperament and a powerful voice make an astounding impression. A. Janutas (M. Cavaradossi) said that after O. Dyka's forte he needed some minutes to recover because the feeling was as if a jet plane has flown nearby. Yet not just the power of her voice but the entirety of her talent and genuineness witness that O. Dyka will become a star at the international level.

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However Puccini does not wait. Tosca's performers need to have great dramatic talent. This opera does not have long arias where the singers can compensate for lack of acting. The most dramatic second act that features Tosca's and Scarpia's fight is written as a dialogue narrated in the language of music. Over an hour Tosca transforms from a vain coquette who has come to solve a small problem – to save her beloved from prison – into a cold-blooded murderer who finally realises the outcome and gradually loses her reason. This interpretation of Tosca's



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Photo Harri Rospu

portrait is a real challenge for O. Dyka, who sometimes tries to surmount it with the power of her voice, not by acting. S. Leiferkus sings impeccably. His voice attracts Tosca into the trap and kills her ruthlessly.

Puccini is dangerous for amateurs. He created his drama for a theatre where the composer, the stage director and the performers act equally professional. The quartet of R. Banionis, O. Dyka, S. Leiferkus and B. Meisuradze represent this kind of theatre. ■

