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## For Opening Night at the Metropolitan, a New Sound: Booing

By [DANIEL J. WAKIN](#)

Harsh booing at the gala opening night of the [Metropolitan Opera](#) — where strong negative reactions are rarely heard, at least in comparison with European [opera](#) houses — was still ringing in the ears of the opera world on Tuesday.

The Met defended the new production of Puccini's "Tosca," as did its Swiss director, Luc Bondy, who made his debut at the house on Monday night. Audience members, some of whom had paid \$1,250 for a ticket, gave ovations to the singers. But when Mr. Bondy took the stage, loud and prolonged booing broke out in parts of the house.

Some Internet commenters called the production pretentious, textually unfaithful and clichéd. But many others found it refreshing and believable.

[Peter Gelb](#), the Met's general manager, said he was not surprised at the reaction to the production under the circumstances. The Bondy version replaced that of [Franco Zeffirelli](#), a favorite of Met audiences, whose "Tosca" had been a Met staple since 1985.

"There are people in that audience who came there expecting not to like anything," Mr. Gelb said. "They were perhaps rooted in the past. But I think a lot of the audience enjoyed it and saw it for what it was meant to be, which was a modern theatrical presentation of a classic in which musical standards were fulfilled."

Mr. Gelb acknowledged that his director had taken liberties. "But the liberties he took were intelligent ones," Mr. Gelb added. He said that the rest of the run was sold out and that the production would return next season. "It certainly is the 'Tosca' of the immediate future," he said. "We're proud of it."

Mr. Bondy's vision is a spare one. The sets and costumes are stark. He applies violent and lewd touches. Tosca gashes the portrait of the Magdalene (with a breast bared) painted by her lover, Cavaradossi; Scarpia, the villain, clasps a statue of the Madonna in a sacrilegious embrace; and three lascivious women drape and fondle him in his study at the outset of Act II.

Mr. Bondy said that his direction was rooted in the text. The tearing of the picture is a natural extension of Tosca's jealous rants. Scarpia's cry, "Tosca, you make me forget God!," supports his Madonna hug. And Scarpia has clearly stated his fondness for the possession and disposal of women: hence the three female playthings at the opening of Act II, even though the libretto does not call for them.

The director blamed a strain of hidebound traditionalism for the lusty boos.

"The reaction was very, very violent because they have a 'Tosca' since 22 years or 30 years and they don't want to see something different," Mr. Bondy said. "To think one work exists, and it has a final interpretation, is a problem."

Mr. Bondy also fired back at Mr. Zeffirelli, who had said in an interview that reports about the new production had led him to view it as a betrayal of Puccini's intent and had called Mr. Bondy a third-rate director.

"I'm a third-rate director, and he is a second assistant of Visconti," Mr. Bondy said, referring to Mr. Zeffirelli's early collaborations with the director [Luchino Visconti](#). "I learned to be a director. He didn't invent Puccini. He's only Zeffirelli. I'm only Luc Bondy — more, not."

Renaud Machart, chief critic of the French newspaper *Le Monde*, who attended the opening night and gave the production a favorable review, said that the booing resulted from ingrained expectations based on "fake traditions" of opera direction.

"But that is typical of many audiences, including France and Europe," Mr. Machart said in an interview. "Believe me, I see so many things which are outrageous and stupid and try to do the opposite of what's in the libretto. This is not what Bondy's doing."

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