



Dustin Hoffman presents the
30th Anniversary Restoration and Re-Release of the Beloved Music Documentary

TOSCA'S KISS

A film by Daniel Schmid

Starring Sara Scuderi, Giovanni Puligheddu, Leonida Bellon,
Salvatore Locapo and Giuseppe Manacchini

1984 / 87 minutes / Switzerland / An Icarus Films Release

"Touching and exhilarating... Bravissimo!" –The New York Times

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SYNOPSIS

Meet the inhabitants of the "Casa di Riposa" in Milan, the world's first home for retired musicians, founded by composer Giuseppe Verdi in 1896. In his beloved film *Tosca's Kiss*, which has developed an underground cult following since it was released in 1984 and is now a favorite among music and film lovers worldwide, director Daniel Schmid captures a world in which these wonderful opera singers re-live their triumphant roles of the glorious past. The real-life inspiration for *Quartet*, Dustin Hoffman's \$60 million-grossing hit directorial debut which starred Dame Maggie Smith in the role of a feisty opera diva, *Tosca's Kiss* is a touching and often hilarious film on the subject of aging and the power and timeless capacity of music to inspire.

SELECTED FESTIVALS

World Premiere, Locarno International Film Festival 1984
Official Selection, Florence Film Festival 1984
Winner, First Prize, Chicago International Film Festival 1984
Official Selection, Festival International du Nouveau Cinema, Montreal 1984
Official Selection, Hofer Filmtage 1984
Official Selection, Rotterdam Film Festival 1985
Official Selection, Cinema du Reel, Paris 1985
Official Selection, Viennale, Vienna 1985
Official Selection, American Film Festival, New York 1985
Winner, Second Prize, Red RibLon 1985
Official Selection, Sydney International Film Festival 1985
Official Selection, Music on Screen Film Festival, Bruxelles 1985
Official Selection, Jerusalem Film Festival 1985
Official Selection, Festival Figueira da Foz, Portugal 1985
Official Selection, Internationaal Filmgebeuren Van Vlaanderen, Gent 1985
Winner, Best Music Documentary, Mostra International de Cinema em Sao Paulo 1985
Official Selection, Zurich Film Award 1985
Winner, IDA Award International Documentary Association, 1986
Official Selection, Venice Classics, Venice International Film Festival, 2013

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Daniel Schmid was born to a family of hotel proprietors on 26th December 26, 1941 in the small Grisons town of Flims. In the sixties he studied at the Free University Berlin and attended the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin. He worked together with Peter Lilienthal, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Werner Schroeter. During this period (1971-1980), he also worked as an actor. From 1970 to 2004, Schmid made 15 films, and from 1984 he directed seven operas at the Zurich Opera House and the Grand Théâtre Geneva. In 1999, he was awarded an Honorary Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival. Due to ill health, he was forced to discontinue shooting his last film. Daniel Schmid died of cancer in August 2006.

Filmography:

Beresina oder Die letzten Tage der Schweiz (1999)

The Written Face (1995)

Hors saison (1992)

Les amateurs (1991)

Jenatsch (1987)

Il Bacio di Tosca (1984)

Mirage de la vie (1983)

Hécate (1982)

Notre Dame de la Croisette (1981)

Violanta (1977)

Schatten der Engel (1976)

La Paloma (1974)

Heute nacht oder nie (1972)

Thut alles im Finstern, eurem Herrn das Licht zu ersparen (1970)



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Increasingly I think of myself as making forays across the faltering line between the actual and the dream, between reality and imagination. For as long as I can remember I've been following that narrow path, smuggling things back and forth from one side to the other.

The idea of making a film with old opera stars living long forgotten in a palace in Milan, appealed to my interest in this area where fiction and documentary meet. I was well aware of the danger, namely the combination of pathos with banality, the grotesqueness of it and the element of exposure tied up with that. These former singers all live out the stories of their lives in a fictitious setting, and none of them knows exactly anymore what is true and what actually happened. They claim to be 80 years old and are in fact 90. The boundary between reality and fantasy moves back and forth for them with the utmost ease, which constantly happens to me too.

And the time since their last performance dwindles to a few years. When asked when they made their last recording, they reply: "Oh, at least three or four years ago"—but in fact perhaps 40 or 45 years have gone by. It makes for a kind of intermediate reality; for if one has imagined something for thirty years, it becomes one's reality whether it has happened or not. In addition these former singers are distinguished by the healthy portion of exhibitionism required in order to be able to perform. And finally, our work itself was an attempt to play with the boundary between documentary and fiction. But to clarify this, I must back-track a bit.

Because of the presence of the camera, every shot in a film is an act of terrorism and pornography. And the more seriously we wish to practice our profession—as a craft, because I regard myself as a craftsman not as an artist—the more we play the part of the vampire; meaning, one sucks out the strength of those out front, as an act of provocation. And this was certainly the case in Milan; only these people know what was going on from their stage experience. That gave us the possibility to count on them as accomplices right from the start and for us to treat each other playfully. A flourishing dependence does indeed exist between "vampires" and their "victims".

Certainly this has something to do with manipulation; but, firstly, this is the basis of all directors work anyway and, secondly, in this case this existed within a conspiratorial relationship. One old singer still has his trunk from his trans-Atlantic tour stored in the cellar. We heard of this and went down to the cellar together and shot the scene with the old operatic couple, trying on his costumes from productions of years ago. Or the incident with Sara Scuderi, who was one of the most brilliant interpreters of "Tosca" in the twenties and is 80 years old now: she was not going to sing, as her doctor had forbidden it. But when I struck up a Puccini motif on the piano, something inside her changed and for a second she became a prima donna again, with an audience of 3,000 in front of her. And for the end of the film, we built a stage next to a curtain in the Casa, ran taped applause from La Scala and staged last curtain calls. Everyone came out from behind the curtain and took a final bow. And behind the curtain all hell was let loose, walking sticks were thrown aside, age, aches, ailments were all forgotten as

everyone pushed to the front—while knowing full well it was a fake situation.

Even if the gestures and airs of these former stars now tend to the grotesque, they also exude a dignity and greatness which is unique. The institution "Casa Verdi", as a whole, is something wonderful; and it is to be found in what is for me the most marvellous, humane country in the world. If culture is that which is left over when everything has been forgotten, then it is continuously present everywhere in Italy. In the "Casa Verdi" the very chamber-maids are encyclopaedia of the opera: this staff would have enchanted Paeolini. No other land has anything like it. Only in Italy does this type of humane culture which is in no way "bourgeois" exist, infiltrating everything and sanctioning the existence of such a unique institution.

"La voce in bellezza", it's a question of a few years, perhaps ten; and then sometime or other the point is reached where it's downhill from now on and a singer has to ask himself whether or not he should retire. The residents of the Casa Verdi all have this experience behind them, and now here they sit in their rooms—more protected than other old people, for the Casa has a doctor, three nurses, a physiotherapy unit and a staff of about twenty to care for the well-being of its pensioners. The external setting of their lives has been reduced to furnishings which are identical in all rooms, a few personal photographs, postcards and television, on which they occasionally watch an opera broadcast: nowhere in the world is such a critical opera audience to be found. Almost all performances fall below their standards and they are particularly hard on singers in their own respective registers. In the mornings they sit in these little rooms, which have nothing in common with the Casa's

magnificent reception rooms, busily preparing for their "entrance" at 11 o'clock in the corridor. Then they wander about the passages and wait for lunch in the vicinity of the dining room, always an hour too early. For example, I once witnessed one such "entrance" in the television room, when a former star came in, heard the Eurovision tune and, joining in the music, swept through the empty television room singing - probably in the style of her entrances on stage at La Scala.

These entrances are a perpetual "make-believe", always somewhat over the top. But I was impressed by the fact that each one was on his own "wavelength," his own "channel," that friendships hardly exist. On the other hand competition is rife, which apparently keeps them young: one wants to speak to so-and-so, the others claim he is dead. Then the door opens and in walks the supposedly dead man. In this respect they are utterly shameless. On one occasion I obviously spoke at too great length to one old opera star; anyway the next day her portrait of Puccini, personally dedicated to her by him, was scratched-all over. And when I asked who would come to a Gala Evening in La Scala, the reaction was the same everywhere: "Who for? For Callas? No, I don't think I'll go." Once again they refuse out of competitiveness, but also because they are convinced that La Scala, and opera in general, are in a decline, and because the opera in which they once sang touch them painfully.

ABOUT THE CASA VERDI, MILAN

Giuseppe Verdi, who had no direct heirs, carried the idea of a *Casa di riposo*, a retreat, around with him for ten years. Two years before his death the neo-renaissance building was completed. He had built it on the Piazza Buonarroti in Milan with the help of the architect Camille Boito, brother of Arrigo Boito, his librettist of many years' standing. But he did not want the home to be opened before his death, as he did not like being thanked. On the other hand he wanted to be buried in the Casa's crypt, together with his second wife, Giuseppina Strepponi, who had been a famous primadonna in the 1840's.

Verdi intended the home for musicians, in particular of course for the *gente del spettacolo lirico*—for those of the opera, who "were less fortunate in life than I and who were not endowed with the gift of thrift". He laid down in his will that all his royalties were to go to the *Fondazione Giuseppe Verdi* and thus to the old people's home. Since its opening on 10th October, 1902, the birthday of the composer who had died the previous year, more than 1,000 composers, conductors, musicians and singers have found a home there. The regulations for admission follow the hierarchy of the opera itself: first composers are offered a room, then conductors, and then down the ranks, ending with members of the chorus. Today the house accommodates around 65 people, mostly aged between 80-96 years, five of which are former stars of the thirties: first and foremost Sara Scuderi, then Irma Colasanti, Giuseppina Sani, Giulia Scaramelli and Giuseppe Manacchini.

In 1962 the rights on Verdi's complete works expired; since then the Casa Verdi has been living off its capital. In 1978, in a very difficult financial situation, the *Associazione di amici della casa di riposo* was founded, which has raised more than 100 million lire over the last few years, partly from donations and partly from the personal support of singers. Thus for example Luciano Pavarotti gives a concert once or twice a year for the Casa Verdi.

What will happen in the future, however, is still uncertain.

—Daniel Schmid

IN THE PRESS

THE SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

By James M. Keller, June 6, 2014

4/4 Stars! Apart from Giuseppe Verdi's 27 operas, his legacy included the retirement home for musicians he founded in Milan. Daniel Schmid's 1984 documentary wanders the halls of the Casa Verdi, spending time with aged opera singers who are eccentric, temperamental, and utterly endearing. "Here you never live in the present," explains a staffer. These retired divas and divos are still onstage by their reckoning, lapsing easily into their roles of yore. The scene in which soprano Sara Scuderi admires one of her ancient recordings has by now caused tears to well up in three decades of viewers.

The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Moving testament to the power of art. Inspired Tosca's Kiss documents lives of retired opera luminaries

By David Sterritt, August 8, 1985

GIUSEPPE Verdi built a Milanese palace called Casa Verdi near the end of his life. Funded by royalties from his music, it has operated since 1902 as a retirement home for Italian opera musicians. Last year the noted Swiss filmmaker Daniel Schmid had the inspired idea of documenting the faded splendors of this building and its occupants. Avoiding the twin pitfalls of lazy sentiment and clinical coolness, he has produced a deeply moving and remarkably entertaining study—one of the best movies ever made on the subjects of music, old age, and the capacity of art to sustain and uplift the human spirit.

Tosca's Kiss takes advantage of the similarities between cinema and opera, two elaborate and synthetic branches of show business. Like the aging singers and players his film focuses on, director Schmid roams the hallways and living quarters of Casa Verdi at a leisurely pace, relishing chance encounters and coaxing each acquaintance to share whatever memories, histories, or fantasies come to mind.

And the residents respond as no other people would, cheerfully treating the unexpected camera as an extension of the opera stage that most of them lost direct contact with many years ago. They chat, they reminisce, they improvise with words and music alike. And at a few splendid moments they throw all vestiges of caution to the wind and ham it up like the unstoppable troupers they've spent their lives becoming.

One key to the success of *Tosca's Kiss* is Schmid's ability to translate his personal fascination with the Casa Verdi crowd into tactful and sensitive visual terms. One example is a profoundly touching scene with Sara Scuderi, an aging diva who becomes a central figure in the film. Seated at a table bearing a phonograph, she listens to a recording she once made, her eyes shining with emotion and her voice rising quietly in song during favorite passages. Schmid's camera shares her mingled joy, wistfulness, and nostalgia without intruding on them. Moving gently toward her and stopping at a discreet distance, it takes us into her heart while avoiding any hint of rudeness or exploitation.

In his notes on the film, Schmid acknowledges his longtime interest in "smuggling things back and forth... across the faltering line between the actual and the dream, between reality and imagination." The residents of Casa Verdi are ideal accomplices in this artistic mission, being performers by profession and dreamers by nature -- to the point where they are sometimes unsure where dreams leave off and true recollections begin.

Tosca's Kiss is sturdy and informative as a sociological study, detailing the lives of retired artists and capturing such eccentricities as their disdain for current opera (which never measures up to their remembered standard) and their penchant for manufactured memories, grand entrances, costumery, and the like. On a deeper level, though, *Tosca's Kiss* is something much greater: a testament to the power of art and its exalting effect on lives that embrace it without stinting.

The New York Times

By Walter Goodman, July 24, 1985

Casa Verdi in Milan was founded by Giuseppe Verdi as a home for retired singers and musicians from the Italian opera. Although the royalties from Verdi's work ran out some years ago, the home carries on, and a Swiss movie maker, Daniel Schmid, had the engaging idea of doing a documentary about it. What he found in Casa Verdi, along with a piano in every corner of the resplendent public rooms, were elderly people adrift in music and memories. *Tosca's Kiss* which opens today at the Film Forum, is a compilation of interviews, conversations and operatic reminiscences...

Sara Scuderi, a renowned interpreter of *Tosca* in the 1920's at La Scala—a name she utters in a whisper—hums, giggles and sings along as she listens to one of her old recordings. "Bella ! Bella! Bella!" she cries.

Miss Scuderi also performs a seemingly impromptu duet with Leonida Bellon, a heroic tenor who can still belt out a big number. They touch hands in shared melancholy; they kiss. In another scene, she gives him "Tosca's kiss"—a dagger to Scarpia's heart. "Die, you wretch!" He falls into a telephone booth. After a moment, he asks, "Can I get up?"

On his feet, Mr. Bellon, the house humorist, criticizes a fellow resident, a baritone, for holding a note too long. "Switch off the light when you leave," he says.

A dapper 80-year-old named Giuseppe Manacchini doesn't let his wife (who played opposite him a half-century ago in "La Traviata" and "La Forza del Destino") get in a word as he gives a running commentary on a trunkful of costumes he once took along on a tour to Rio de Janeiro, where he sang Rigoletto. "When I think how I sweated in that jacket," he says, and then, excitedly, "I want to put it on." As he dons Rigoletto's outfit, we hear an old recording of him singing the role. Afterward, he repacks the costumes and bows to the trunk.

Age has not dulled the performers' competitiveness. A former member of the La Scala chorus insists, between spoonfuls of soup, that it is the members of the chorus and not the soloists who keep an opera going...

[The film] can be touching and exhilarating. The inhabitants of Casa Verdi, some wearing coats indoors against a chill that no coat can subdue, come into their own when they join in song. The roles they played years ago seem more real and certainly more warming to them than their lives offstage, even in the comfort of Casa Verdi. "Here you never live in the present," says a guard. A resident says, "You'll find me singing two hours after my death."

The ending is inspired. With joy in their eyes and a spring in their step, five of those who have been featured in the film come before a curtain and take bows to resounding applause taped at La Scala. Bravissimo! Vissi d'arte.

FILM CREDITS

Film title: "Tosca's Kiss"

Directed by Daniel Schmid

Starring: Sara Scuderi, Giovanni Puligheddu, Leonida Bellon, Salvatore Locapo, and Giuseppe Manacchini.

Photography by Renato Berta

Music by Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini, Gaetano Donizetti

Produced by Hans-Ulrich Jordi and Marcel Hoehn

Language: Italian with English subtitles.

Running time: 87 minutes.

Format: 4:3, 16:9; Mono

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