

The Italian Ministry of Culture  
Tuscany Region  
Fondazione Festival Pucciniano

*present*

# *Puccini e la fanciulla* *(Puccini and the Girl)*

a film by  
**Paola Baroni and Paolo Benvenuti**



produced by  
**Arsenali Medicei**

in collaboration with  
**Intolerance Scuola di Cinema del Comune di Viareggio**  
**(Intolerance Film School of Viareggio)**

and

**Mediateca Regionale Toscana Film Commission**

with the support of

**the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome Municipality, Lucca Province, the  
Municipalities of Viareggio, Massarosa, Vecchiano, S. Giuliano Terme, the Ente Parco  
S. Rossore, Migliarino and Massaciuccoli, and Fondazione Arpa**



Arsenali Medicei



Fondazione  
Festival  
Pucciniano



MINISTERO  
PER I BENI E  
LE ATTIVITÀ  
CULTURALI

## STORY

It is 1908 and Giacomo Puccini, in his villa at Torre del Lago, works on a new opera based on the drama by David Belasco, *The Girl of the Golden West*. In front of the composer's home the "Chalet da Emilio" rises out of the lake's waters, suspended on piles. The Chalet is a rustic haunt made of wood and sedge where fishing and hunting poachers gather. Behind the bar, serving up wine and smiles, is Giulia, Emilio Manfredi's good-looking daughter. Lately the Maestro has become an enthusiastic regular at the place: he goes there and has a drink, plays scopone, smokes a cigarette, then returns to his music as if reborn. Giulia is the cousin of Puccini's young maid servant, Doria Manfredi. One day in late summer when the mistress and master are out, Doria surprises Fosca, the composer's step-daughter, in bed with her lover, Guelfo Civinini, Puccini's young librettist. From that moment on, Fosca, worried that the maid will reveal what she has seen, tracks Doria's every move. From this constant attention, Fosca catches indisputable nods and gestures of complicity between the unaware maid servant and her stepfather. Fosca tells her mother, Elvira, of this relationship and suggests that her mother watch the couple's behaviour. Catching a nod between Giacomo and Doria, Elvira follows her husband on the sly one evening after dinner. She sees him go to a secluded spot where he is joined by a girl. After a long kiss, the two lay down on the grass. Elvira, convinced that she has surprised her husband with their maid servant, Doria, flings herself upon them in the darkness, but the two manage to escape and vanish. Though Elvira has not actually seen the girl's face, she is absolutely convinced of her identity. The next day she throws Doria out of the house. While Puccini is totally immersed in the composition of his new opera and resorts to all ploys possible to carry on his secret liaison with Giulia (who is the living model of his *Minnie*), Elvira, spurred on by Fosca, seizes any occasion to destroy Doria's reputation. She drives this persecution to extreme consequences. The poor Doria, as a "humble maid servant" only guilty of having played the role of *love messenger* between the Maestro and her cousin Giulia, is overwhelmed by Elvira's shameful accusations. Doria finds her only possibility for redemption in suicide.

## CONCEPT

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) is considered one of the greatest masters of music of all times. Through his compositions he communicates all the complexity of the artistic and cultural ferments that marked the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. And it was at a Tuscan idyll of extraordinary natural beauty, a strip of land between lake and sea, Torre del Lago, that cinema has reconstructed the enchantment and mystery of Puccini's musical creation. The aim was to elucidate one of the darkest episodes in the Maestro's life: the tragedy of Doria Manfredi, his young maid servant, who committed suicide in January 1909.

A special feature of the film: there are no dialogues. There are only voice-overs that read the letters people involved in the story write to each other as the drama unfolds. The choice of the "silent film" in the dramaturgic construction of this story was motivated by ethic and aesthetic considerations. It was felt that the "silent film" was the only expressive approach to achieve that "pure cinema" able to express concepts and emotions through the unique flow of sound and image. That is, a film built upon a continuous and open dialogue between the becoming of the cinematic expression and that of music, until the two languages become but one.

*Paola Baroni and Paolo Benvenuti*



### **Paolo Benvenuti** – Director

Paolo Benvenuti was born in Pisa, Italy, on 30 January 1946. He began painting at a very early age. He attended the Istituto d'arte and the Magistero d'arte of Florence where he obtained a degree in 1965. The following year, Benvenuti enrolled in the Fine Arts Academy of Florence, the Accademia di Belle Arti, but courses were suspended there due to the 1966 flood. In 1968 Benvenuti began experimenting in avant-garde cinema and gradually turned from painting. With his documentary *Fuori gioco*, he won the "Fedic" award for Best Short Film at the Montecatini Terme Festival of that year. In 1971, with his documentary *Del Monte Pisano*, the director explored the culture of rural Tuscany. This contributed to promoting the revival of the Maggi, a form of traditional theatre typical of central Italy. Benvenuti's medium-length *Medea, il teatro del maggio di Buti*, made for the RAI in 1972, was selected for the Film Forum of the 1973



Berlin Film Festival. During that same year he directed the stage version of *Medea*, presented at the International Theatre Festival in Nancy, France, directed by Jack Lang. In 1972, Benvenuti offered his assistance on the set of *L'età di Cosimo dei Medici* directed by Roberto Rossellini. He was intensely inspired by Rossellini's didactic cinema of those years and began to more intensely pursue his own historical and archival studies. Benvenuti's discovery of unpublished manuscripts about the 1494-1509 war between Pisa and Florence led to the director's first feature in 1974,

*Frammento di cronaca volgare*, for the RAI. In 1975, he was first assistant director to Jean Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet for the film *Moses und Aaron*, based on the opera by Arnold Schoenberg. From 1976 Benvenuti began conducting courses and seminars on the theory of audiovisual language at several institutions in Italy and abroad. These included such schools as the Berliner Ensemble (Germany), the Havana Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV (Cuba), the Turin Scuola Holden, and the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia of Rome. For the municipality of Palermo, in 1997 Benvenuti and sociologist Danilo Dolci conceived a film school based upon a maieutic structure and approach. In 2001 Benvenuti directed the project *Intolerance Scuola di Cinema del Comune di Viareggio (Intolerance Film School of Viareggio)*. The year 1998 marked his encounter with Paola Baroni, with whom he launched a fruitful artistic collaboration, and they were married in 2002. In 2003 Benvenuti began teaching seminars on "Storia del Cinema del Diritto" at the Department of Jurisprudence of the Università degli Studi of Cassino. Benvenuti's filmography includes, in addition to many shorts and medium-length films, the following six features produced with the support of the Italian Ministry of Culture:

- *Il bacio di Giuda* (1988), produced by Alfea Cinematografica, presented in the "First Film" programme at the Venice Film Festival – International Critics' Week
- *Confortorio* (1992), produced by Arsenali Medicei, presented in competition at the Locarno Festival (Switzerland), winner of the Jury Youth Award
- *Tiburzi* (1996), produced by Arsenali Medicei and Ager 3, presented in competition at the festivals in Locarno and Toronto (Canada)
- *Gostanza da Libbiano* (2000), produced by Arsenali Medicei, presented in competition at the Locarno Festival, winner of the Special Jury Award
- *Segreti di stato* (2003), produced by Fandango, presented in competition at the Venice Film Festival and the Toronto Festival (Canada)
- *Puccini e la fanciulla* (2008), produced by Arsenali Medicei and the Fondazione Festival Pucciano for the 150th Giacomo Puccini Anniversary

### **Paola Baroni** – *Art Director*

Paola Baroni (b. Verona, 15 February 1961), studied drama from 1988 to 1990 at the Scuola Regionale di Attività Attoriali under the direction of Ezio Maria Caserta in the ambit of activities of the Teatro Laboratorio of Verona. In 1989 Baroni made her acting debut at the Teatro Olimpico of Vicenza in *Sofonisba* by Trissino, with Paola Borboni (an ETI production). In 1989, the actress performed a monologue based on *Lettera ad un bambino mai nato* by Oriana Fallaci. From 1990 to 1992 Baroni participated in drama courses on the latest Stanislavsky method conducted by Argentine director Carlos Alsina. In 1992, in Verona, Baroni recited poetry on Joan of Arc authored by poet Maurizio Cucchi. It was in 1993 that Baroni discovered the work of Paolo Benvenuti. In 1998, after seeing his film *Tiburzi* (1996) she decided to actively collaborate with him, participating in the making of *Gostanza da Libbiano*. For this film, Baroni coached the actors and also assisted in the directing. With Benvenuti, she co-wrote the story and screenplay for *Segreti di stato* and worked with the director in coaching the actors and directing the film. Baroni moved to Pisa in 2003 where she worked with the Cooperative "Il Lucignolo" to promote the maieutic seminar for children, *Facciamo un film*. The experience led to the production of the short film *L'incubo di un maestro*, entirely written, filmed, performed, directed, and edited by these children. In 2004 Baroni conducted a maieutic seminar on creative screenwriting in the programme on History of Criminal Law of the Department of Jurisprudence at the University of Cassino. In 1966, Paola Baroni made her stage directing debut with the play *Pietro Calamandrei: in difesa di Danilo Dolci* which she wrote based on the pleadings of the great jurist at the 1956 trial of the famous sociologist. During 2006 to 2007, Baroni and Paolo Benvenuti co-wrote the story and screenplay for the film *Puccini e la fanciulla*. Baroni coordinated the music project for the film, which used the development for piano by Carlo Carignani from *La fanciulla del West* (*The Girl of the Golden West*). In 2008, Baroni worked as art director for *Puccini e la fanciulla*, collaborating on the mise-en-scène and coaching the actors. She also worked with Benvenuti in directing the film.



### **Riccardo Joshua Moretti** – *Leading actor*

An internationally renowned musician, Moretti was born in Pontedra in the province of Pisa. All of his life, Moretti has been personally and professionally bound to the figure of Maestro Giacomo Puccini. For the film *Puccini e la fanciulla*, he was delighted to accept Paolo Benvenuti's offer to act in the film and bring his musical experience to the leading role. Riccardo Joshua Moretti is a composer and conductor of the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra. He has recorded a number of CDs including notably *La storia del soldato* by I Stravinsky, narrated by Giancarlo Giannini, *Le più belle colonne sonore di Nino Rota* and *Nino Rota al Bolshoi*. His compositions for cinema and theatre include *Golem* with Adalberto Maria Merli. Moretti's many recordings for the label CNI MUSIC-RAI TRADE include *Il canto d'Israele*, *Ebraica*, the soundtracks for Murnau's silent film *Nosferatu*, Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, and *Il giardino dei melograni*. For theatre, Moretti worked with the *Lindsay Kemp Company* on the productions *Dream* and *Salome*. Riccardo Joshua Moretti teaches at Parma's A Boito Conservatory where he holds the chairs for Flute and Film Music Composition.



## CAST

<b>Tania Squillario</b>	<i>the maid servant Doria Manfredi</i>
<b>Riccardo J Moretti</b>	<i>Giacomo Puccini</i>
<b>Giovanna Daddi</b>	<i>Elvira, Puccini's wife</i>
<b>Debora Mattiello</b>	<i>Fosca, Elvira's daughter</i>
<b>Federica Chezzi</b>	<i>Giulia, Doria's cousin</i>

## CREW AND PRODUCTION

<b>Executive producer</b>	<i>Gianpaolo Smiraglia</i>
<b>Story and screenplay</b>	<i>Paola Baroni and Paolo Benvenuti</i>
<b>Set design</b>	<i>Paolo Benvenuti and Aldo Buti</i>
<b>Costumes</b>	<i>Simonetta Leoncini</i>
<b>Director of photography</b>	<i>Giovanni Battista Marras</i>
<b>Sound designer</b>	<i>Mirco Mencacci</i>
<b>Sound</b>	<i>Alberto Amato</i>
<b>Editor</b>	<i>Cesar Augusto Meneghetti</i>
<b>Music project and Art director</b>	<i>Paola Baroni</i>
<b>Director</b>	<i>Paolo Benvenuti</i>

**Filming and screening format:** 1 x 1.33  
**Color,** 25 mm  
**Sound:** Dolby Digital  
**Running time:** 84 minutes

**Press Bureau of the Fondazione Festival Pucciniano**  
**Alessandra Delle Fave**  
**Tel +39 0584 353304 Mob +39 348 3859089**

**Press Bureau of the Mediateca Regionale Toscana Film Commission**  
**Elisabetta Vagaggini**  
**Tel +39 055 2719030 Mob +39 347 3353564**

**International distribution:**  
**Adriana Chiesa Enterprises**  
**Via Barnaba Oriani, 24 / A**  
**00197 Rome, Italy**  
**Tel +39 068086052 Fax +39 0680687855**  
**[info@adrianachiesaenterprises.com](mailto:info@adrianachiesaenterprises.com)**

**Executive producer:**  
**Gianpaolo Smiraglia**  
**via Raimondo Montecuccoli, 32**  
**00176 Rome, Italy**  
**Mob +39 3927247116**  
**[g.smiraglia@arsenalimedicei.it](mailto:g.smiraglia@arsenalimedicei.it)**

## THE TUSCANY REGION, A FRIEND OF CINEMA

The Tuscany region is a "friend of cinema", land and community known in every part of the world for its countless merits, yet also for some rather strong defects. These might include the curious penchant for outspokenness. And thus our region is "Tuscanally" pleased to have fostered this work on Giacomo Puccini. The film reveals to the general public one of the more obscure chapters in the life of Giacomo Puccini. Following the traces of unpublished documents discovered in a forgotten suitcase, Paolo Benvenuti evocatively tells the story of the creation of Puccini's opera *La fanciulla del West* (*The Girl of the Golden West*). This occurred simultaneously with a tragic episode that shook the composer's family life and the little town of Torre del Lago. Here, every year, one of the most important Puccini opera festivals is held, precisely on the bank of the lake that Puccini elected as his Eden. And Benvenuti, in his film, retraces this with tremendous mastery. He calls forth those poignant images and sounds of nature that certainly inspired the great composer who lived and worked in Torre del Lago for over thirty years. As the administration of such a special region as Tuscany, we are far from any desire to "recruit" for propagandistic purposes the most performed composer in the world. Besides being foolish, this would be impossible anyway, and this is certainly not our intention. No one can ride on Puccini's back, nor is he a holy image to be exhibited and used for the sole aims of cultural and tourist marketing. If in the limits of our own domain we have sought to support this project, to be presented at the 2008 Venice Film Festival, our motivations were two-fold. Firstly, it seemed good to us, with all

due respect to the people involved, to bring such a special story to a wide public. Our second motivation was equally important, however. That is, as a challenge to ourselves, as elected representatives: that hopefully it would be Giacomo Puccini, this man of such great passion and artist of indisputable genius, to condition us with the



magic of his music in what, as an institution, most specifically characterises us. If institutions begin to lose the passion for what they do, if politicians lose sight of the meaning of what they should be, then institutions and politicians become obstacles, certainly not support, for citizens. And above all, for those who are most vulnerable, who most need the institutions and their political representatives. No one can ride on Giacomo Puccini's back, and certainly not politicians. Yet, what if it were precisely the Maestro himself of Torre del Lago to ride on *our* backs, as political representatives in search of a more credible music score? And what if, in a time when the sounds of ruin like Fellinian creaking grow more and more intense, it were we as politicians to rediscover – beginning with the harmony of the music composed on the banks of a little Tuscan lake – the meaning of this lost harmony?

*Paolo Cocchi*

*Councillor of Culture, Tourism, and Commerce of the Tuscany Region*

## PUCCINI'S SUITCASE

*Interview with Paolo Benvenuti by Michele Guerra*

I remember one day in Pisa, at Paolo Benvenuti's home, when this great figure of Italian cinema, with that disconcerting simplicity so characteristic of him even when he says or does the most extraordinary things, said to me: "Come, let me show you a film clip of Puccini that I've found". Just then on his computer images appeared that left me speechless: Giacomo Puccini, *in person*, moving, playing music, writing, smoking, taking a walk in front of his villa, going hunting on the Massaciuccoli lake. An epoch making discovery that put us before something of infinite value historically, cinematically, sociologically, and for its media potential. Something that had come to cross the determined and philologically exemplary path that was carrying Benvenuti towards the making of his long-awaited film *Puccini e la fanciulla*.

**Your cinema is experimental, before, after and during the film itself. Would you like to tell us how you found the Puccini film, what the main phases of your research were?**

First of all, the research was not only mine, but it was also conducted by a group of sixteen young people from *Intolerance*, the film school of Viareggio. It all began when these young people wanted to know how I wrote my screenplays. I explained to them that behind every one of my screenplays there was in-depth historical research. The students wanted to experience this for themselves, by starting a historical research project that might eventually lead to a screenplay. This was in 2001. We decided to learn more about the story of Doria Manfredi, Giacomo Puccini's maid servant, who committed suicide in January 1909. It was a subject that I had covered in the past with other students and that I was still nurturing. The young people began interviewing the older people of Torre del Lago but came up against a strange code of silence, almost mafia-like. And so they gave up the interviews and began studying the immense bibliography on Puccini and the letters kept at the Centro Studi Pucciniani in Lucca, particularly those written between 1907 and 1910. Doria had been accused by Elvira, Giacomo's wife, of being her husband's mistress. Elvira claimed to have caught them in the act (which later turned out not to be true), but nevertheless Doria did not defend herself. Other questions came up, that were difficult to answer, but, as the study continued, one student was struck by a statement he had come across in a book that was interesting, though of minor scientific value, entitled "*Puccini minimo*" by Aldo Valleroni. The words that threw new light on the research were more or less this: "the famous Don Juanism of Puccini was not an end in itself, but was functional to his creativity". That is, every time Puccini was to compose an opera, he felt compelled to fall in love with a woman who resembled the heroine of his drama, a woman with whom the Maestro began an affair while writing that particular work. And, inevitably, with the completion of the opera, the affair too would end. Though the author of the book gave various examples of this (from *Bohème* to *Butterfly* to *Turandot*), he could not seem to find any corresponding figure for *La fanciulla del West*. This quite struck us: Doria committed suicide while Puccini was writing *La fanciulla del West*, could she have been the model for Minnie? As we looked for comparisons, it became obvious that she had nothing to do with it. Therefore, either Minnie had no real-life corresponding model, or else there was another woman. The students went back to Torre del Lago and discovered there was another woman, Giulia. She was Doria's cousin and the daughter of Emilio, the owner of the famous restaurant/chalet in front of the Puccini villa. A strapping girl of 1 meter 80 who could match any man, she hunted, could shoot a rifle like any of them, and so forth. When it came to Giulia, the code of silence shattered. Everyone sneered, remarked, and it turned out that not only had Giacomo and Giulia been lovers, but Giulia (who never married) even became pregnant, according to everyone, by Puccini. And so, we then set out to find the child born of this liaison and discovered that he had lived in Pisa, but that he had died and was survived by a daughter. We traced his daughter and found her. She told us the tragic story of Antonio Manfredi, who had always lived far from his mother (Giulia had remained in Torre del Lago and in fact did not even wish to see him) and his unknown father. In 1976 Giulia died, and Antonio was called to

Torre del Lago to collect some of his mother's belongings. These were packed in a suitcase that Antonio, after returning to Pisa, hid away and did not even open, as if trying to bury his past and his mother's. For thirty years no one ever thought about the suitcase. Until January 2007, when I turned up and started to ask questions. I told Antonio's daughter that she could be Puccini's granddaughter, (you saw the photos and the incredible resemblance), and after talking about all of this, she suddenly remembered the suitcase. In it I found photos and letters from Puccini to Giulia of their undeniable affair, written from 1908 to 1922, and then an envelope with about thirty letters from friends, relatives, lawyers about Doria's suicide. Here was evidence of what we more or less had imagined. Underneath these papers were also two biscuit tins, round ones, and inside them the films. I tried lifting the strip from one of the films – they were all stuck together – and I glimpsed a frame of Puccini at the piano. I almost had a heart attack. I took the films to Rome to a laboratory that did restorations and here we now have this exceptional document.

**When you presented part of this film as a preview at the last Venice Film Festival, you were asked by many people after the conference if you would use the film in "Puccini e la fanciulla". But you insisted on the fact that the life of this document was different and independent of that of your film.**

Yes, exactly. Anyway, the film belongs to a later period than the events related in my film. And then, I don't want to mix reality with filmic reconstruction, the two clash. Riccardo Moretti, who plays my Puccini, though he resembles the composer, is nevertheless not Puccini.

**In terms of gestural and decor reconstruction, however, this discovery represents an unexpected and exceptional resource.**

Absolutely. By knowing the film by heart, frame by frame, it is as if I have been put into contact with Puccini himself, with all his ham acting, his provincialism, that comes across so obviously in the way he moves and, above all, with his extraordinary virility that he only fully expresses when at the piano. This is a characteristic that particularly interests me and I would like to try to express it through Riccardo Moretti's acting: it is not a matter of exterior resemblance, but rather an interior one.

**You are considered a "niche" film director who is particularly admired by attentive and refined film buffs. Now for the first time you find yourself in the limelight and in all the major international newspapers. Starting from the Puccini film clips, they all have talked about your project: from "The Times", to "The Guardian", to "Observer", "El Pais, and "Corriere della Sera" and then recently "La Repubblica", and others such as papers in Hungary, Japan, Latin America...**

The spotlights are on Puccini not on me. The 1915 film that I found in the suitcase will have its own life, and there are already a lot of ideas around it. The aim will be to talk about historical research, about my method, and only after that about my own film, *Puccini e la fanciulla*, which is something else. Yet, it will be good for the film, people will be curious to see the result from all this research on the screen.

*(Pisa, October 2007)*