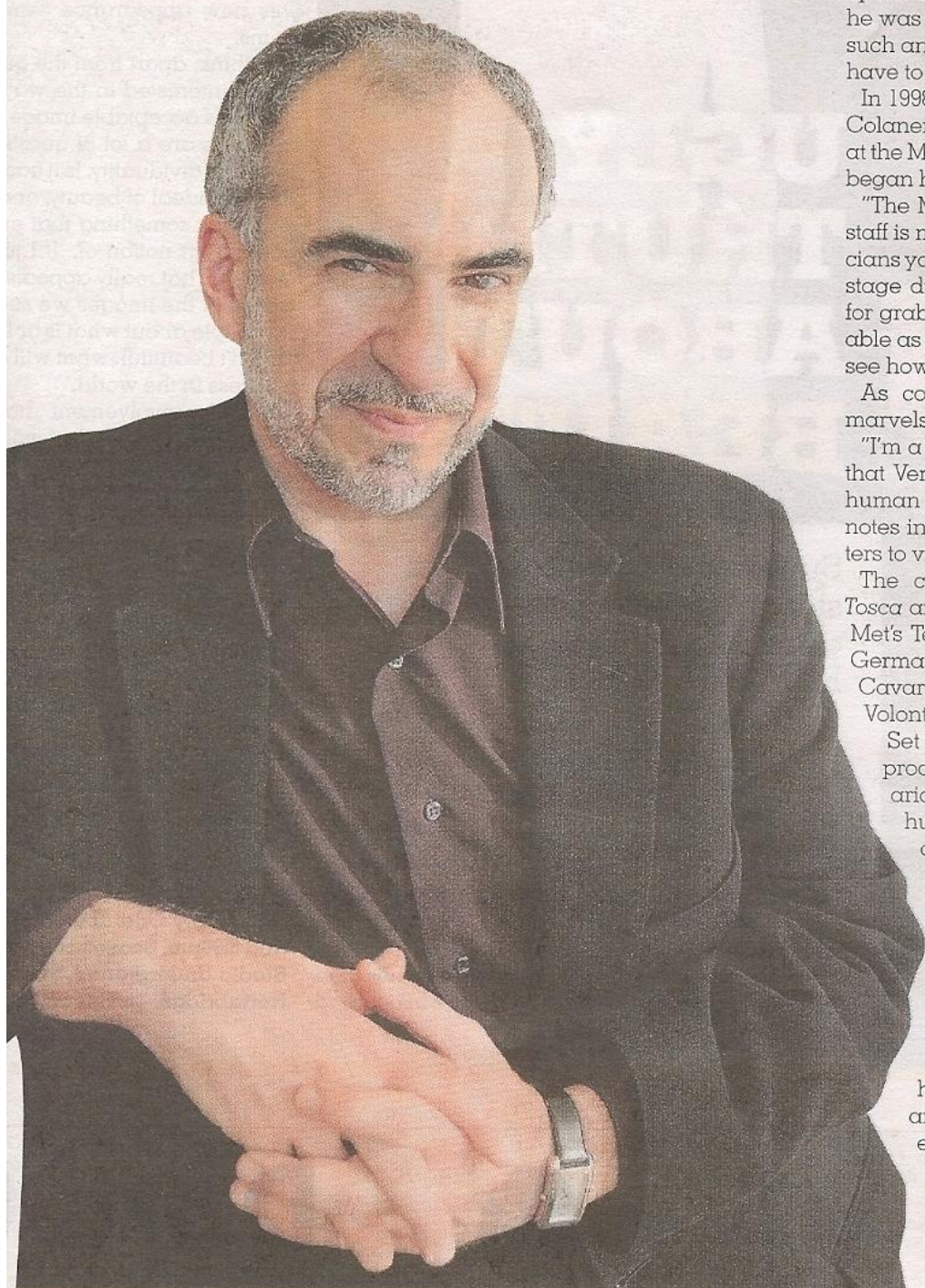


# BRINGING PUCCINI TO LIFE

Renowned New York opera conductor Joseph Colaneri is here to do *Tosca*. By MARIA NOAKES



**A**S a conductor with New York's Metropolitan Opera, Joseph Colaneri is one of the most sought-after maestros in the US – so what is he doing in Perth?

"I always like to go to places where I can work as a conductor where the artistic conditions are very good and here WA Opera is wonderful," Colaneri says over coffee at His Majesty's Theatre.

He is in town to conduct Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* – his fourth collaboration with WA Opera.

"They put these wonderful casts together," he says. "Everyone I work with is very supportive and I really like working with WASO."

Colaneri beams as he waxes lyrical about his love of opera and Puccini – who he rates as one of the great "theatrical artists".

He is full of enthusiasm as he recalls seeing his first opera. It was Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* at the Met and he was 19. "I was so blown away," he says. "It made such an impression on me and I thought to myself, 'I have to get involved in this'."

In 1998, after a stint with the New York City Opera, Colaneri became a member of the conducting roster at the Met. It was a dream come true for the man who began his musical life as a church organist.

"The Met is a great theatre," he says. "The whole staff is made up of some of the most incredible musicians you'll ever meet, as well as conductors, singers, stage directors and set designers. Everything is up for grabs. As soon as an idea comes up, as improbable as it may seem, there are people who say, 'Let's see how we can make that work'."

As conversation turns back to *Tosca*, Colaneri marvels at Puccini's brilliance.

"I'm a huge fan," he says. "Puccini does that thing that Verdi also does – they're able to describe any human emotion, any human feeling, in musical notes in the most incredible way. He brings characters to vivid life."

The characters the composer brings to life in *Tosca* are the ruthless Baron Scarpia, played by the Met's Teddy Tahu Rhodes; Floria Tosca, played by German-born soprano Anke Hoppner; and Mario Cavaradossi, played by Argentinian tenor Dario Volonte.

Set in a church basement, the contemporary production has some of Puccini's most lyrical arias, but at its core the story is about basic human conditions – love, lust, jealousy and corruption.

"*Tosca* is one of those pieces that's relentless. It takes audiences on a great roller-coaster ride," Colaneri says.

When it premiered in Rome in 1900 it was a hit. More than 100 years later, it still resonates with audiences.

"What's so wonderful about going to the theatre to see these pieces is that they're human," Colaneri says. "They're about us and that's really what art is all about – experiencing something that's human."

■ ***Tosca*. April 2-16. His Majesty's Theatre, Perth. Tickets \$42.50-\$152.50, conc. \$37.50-\$132.50, from BOCS.**