

**Paul Salerni (b. 1951)**  
**TONY CARUSO'S FINAL BROADCAST**  
*A One-Act Opera in Ten Short Scenes*  
*Music by Paul Salerni • Libretto by Dana Gioia*

*Setting:* The opera takes place in the studio of a classical music radio station.

*Tony Caruso* - Eric Fennell, Tenor

The Station Crew  
*Intern* - Jacquelyn Familant, Soprano  
*Engineer* - Jan Opalach, Bass-baritone  
*Announcer* - Henry Fogel, Narrator

The Marketing Trio  
*Marketer 1* - Vicki Doney, Soprano  
*Marketer 2* - Val Hawk, Soprano  
*Marketer 3* - Nancy Reed, Soprano

The Parochial School  
*Nun* - Disella Lárusdóttir, Soprano  
*Priest* - Keith Phares, Baritone  
*Young Tony* - Rory Lipkis, Boy soprano

The Three Visions  
*Tony's Mother* - Alison Tupay, Mezzo-soprano  
*Maria Callas* - Phoebe Fennell, Soprano  
*The Dark Woman* - Patricia Risley, Mezzo-soprano

#### [1] SCENE ONE

*Radio Studio: Half an hour before the show. The Station Intern and Broadcast Engineer enter.*

#### INTERN

I can't believe they're shutting down the station.

#### ENGINEER

Believe it, kid. The station's sold—lock, stock, and broadcast frequency.

#### INTERN

How did it happen? The station made money.

#### ENGINEER

Not enough to survive. Some animals are worth more dead.

#### INTERN

This is my first job, and I've lost it after just two weeks!

#### ENGINEER

I've been here ten years. I get fired tonight and rehired on Monday—with a pay cut. The bastards!

#### INTERN

What about Tony?

#### ENGINEER

He's gone. He's dead. The new management hates him.

#### INTERN

How long has he been here?

#### ENGINEER

Since Adam and Eve. Maybe before.

#### INTERN

Quit joking! Tony's a nice guy.

#### ENGINEER

I dunno. Tony has been here forever. He gave Mozart his first airplay.

#### INTERN

How can they cancel his show? *Opera Lover* is a classic.

#### ENGINEER

A classic is what they call a show the day before they cancel it. Making a classic is long hard work. Killing one is easy.

#### [2] SCENE TWO

*The side of the stage is illuminated to reveal the Marketing Trio, which is composed of three women dressed in male business suits—the Account Executive, Program Director, and Marketing Research Director. They sing into a large old-style radio microphone bearing the acronym W E Z Y and perform in the manner of a swing-era girls vocal trio.*

#### ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Easy!

#### PROGRAM DIRECTOR (harmonizing)

Easy!

#### MARKETING RESEARCH DIRECTOR (harmonizing)

Easy!

#### TRIO

Easy listening!

W - E - Z - Y !

#### ANNOUNCER (speaking)

W - E - Z - Y is proud to announce that tonight at midnight, the station begins a new format—Soft Rock...

#### ACCOUNT & RESEARCH

Ahh!

#### ANNOUNCER (spoken)

. . . Easy Listening

#### ACCOUNT & RESEARCH

O h h!

#### ANNOUNCER (spoken)

A sound so smooth, it soothes.

#### ACCOUNT & RESEARCH

O o h!

#### TRIO

W - E - Z - Y !

The station that relaxes — So smooth it soothes.

#### RESEARCH

I'm the brains.

#### PROGRAM

I'm the money.

#### ACCOUNT

I'm the suit.

**PROGRAM / ACCOUNT**

*(They point to the Marketing Research Director)*

He's so smart!

**RESEARCH / ACCOUNT**

*(They point to the Program Director)*

He's so macho!

**PROGRAM / RESEARCH**

*(They point to the Account Executive)*

He's so cute!

**TRIO**

What a night!

Everything's working

Without a hitch.

We can't stop

We can't lose.

**PROGRAM**

I'll get rich.

**MARKETING SONG**

**TRIO**

Fill your drive-time on the freeways

With soothing tunes and world-class DJs,

Super oldies ten in a row.

Win a coffee mug on the call-in show.

Our mega-wattage fills the air

To maximize our market share.

We're bigger, stronger, leaner, taller.

The best ad value for your dollar.

**ACCOUNT** *(aside)*

*(And a free T-shirt for our next caller.)*

**TRIO**

So just stay tuned to 90.7

And you'll discover drive-time heaven.

**[3] SCENE THREE**

*Center stage Radio Studio: Tony Caruso enters the studio. He wears a dressy suit, but is disheveled. He seems slightly drunk. He staggers over to the Engineer and stands there silently.*

**ENGINEER**

You look like hell.

**CARUSO**

I feel like hell.

**INTERN**

I'm so sorry, Tony.

**ENGINEER**

Rotten luck, Tony. But no time to talk now. We have a show to do. We're running late. It's almost nine o'clock. Let's get set up.

**CARUSO** *(to the Intern)*

Welcome to the last act, kid. The grand finale. Twenty-seven years doing this show. When I started, I was a singer. "The Second Caruso," my friends called me. This show was just a sideline. But my opera career never took off. This show is my opera career—I mean was—and I love it. Being here with this music was as wonderful as singing at the Met or La Scala.

**ENGINEER**

Two minutes!

**CARUSO**

. . . This music has meant more to me than anything else in my life. When the show is on, I'm alive, utterly alive!

**ARIA**

I never chose this show.

This show chose me.

I never chose this life.

It happened to me.

I longed to be a star.

I wanted fame.

I wanted one great love.

It never came.

I sat in this studio

Year after year.

Repeat the same mistake, kid.

It's called a career.

Now I'm invisible,

A voice in the air.

Turn off the radio,

And nobody's there.

*(Tony settles in at the console. The Intern stands at a side microphone.)*

**ENGINEER**

Thirty seconds . . .

**ANNOUNCER** *(spoken)*

W - E - Z - Y is proud to present Antonio Caruso's award-winning *Opera Lover*. Now sit back until midnight and enjoy three hours of immortal music and great voices hosted by celebrated singer and commentator Antonio Caruso in what we regret to say will be his final broadcast. And now our star announcer, Antonio Caruso.

**[4] SCENE FOUR**

*Stage left: A Nun is presenting a Choirboy to a Priest. She beams with pride in the child.*

**NUN**

Here is our little star, Father—Tony Caruso. He is in fifth grade.

**PRIEST**

Caruso. That's a lucky name for a singer.

**YOUNG TONY**

Yes, father.

**NUN**

He has the voice of an angel.

**PRIEST**

I have to agree, sister,

The voice of an angel,

Though he is a devil everywhere else.

**NUN**

Sing something for us, Tony. Something you love.

**YOUNG TONY**

*Tantum ergo Sacramentum.*

*Veneremur cernui:*

*Et antiquum documentum,*

*Novo cedat ritui:*

*Praestet fides supplementum*

*Sensuum defectui.*

**NUN**

He'll be famous. A second Caruso.

**NUN & PRIEST**

A second Caruso.

**YOUNG TONY**

*(with nun & priest harmonizing)*

*Genitori, Genitoque*

*Laus et jubilatio:*

*Salus, honor, virtus quoque,*

*Sit et benedictio:*

*Procedenti ab utroque*

*Compar sit laudatio.*

**ALL THREE**

Amen.

*(Fade into next scene)*

**[5] SCENE FIVE**

*Studio: the room is now dark except for the light on Caruso alone at the microphone. He sits there quietly while a selection plays for broadcast. The Engineer and Intern sit behind the dimly lighted glass wall of the sound booth.*

**WOMAN'S VOICE** *(offstage)*

Tonio?

**CARUSO**

Who's that? Quiet! We're broadcasting.

**WOMAN'S VOICE** (*nearer*)

Tonio? *Dove sei?*

**CARUSO**

(*slowly standing as he removes his microphone*)

Mama?

(*A woman dressed in black emerges from the shadows*)

What are you doing here?

*How can you be here? You're dead.*

**MOTHER**

Tonio, *perché si triste?*

Why you so sad?

**CARUSO**

Mama? Why are you here?

*Perché sei tornata?*

**MOTHER**

I came to help you remember.

*Devi ricordare.*

**CARUSO**

Remember what?

**MOTHER**

*Canta per me. Canta qualcosa bella per me.*

**CARUSO**

Mom, I don't sing anymore.

**MOTHER**

*Devi ricordare. Canta per me.*

**CARUSO**

Please, Mama.

**MOTHER**

You had a gift from God.

You had the power to sing.

We had so little then,

But I was never sad

Because you were blessed

*Con un dono divino?*

Where did it go?

**CARUSO**

I never got my break

I never had the chance.

**MOTHER**

Where did the song go?

*Figlio mio, mi dici.*

*Dov'è andato il canto?*

**CARUSO**

*Non dici così, Mama.*

I never lost the gift.

**MOTHER**

*Perché non canti mai?*

*Dov'è andato il canto?*

You had a gift from God.

Where did it go?

She hears a clock strike the hour.

**ANNOUNCER**

And that concludes the first hour of . . .

(*voice fades*)

**MOTHER**

Tony, it's late. I've got to go.

**CARUSO**

Don't leave. We need to talk. I've missed you. . .

**MOTHER**

No, Tony. *Devo andare adesso. Devo andare via.*

She starts to leave.

**CARUSO**

No, stay, stay. *Rimani, Mama, rimani!*

(*She slowly disappears*)

(*softly*) Mama!

**[6] SCENE SIX**

*The Marketing Trio stands before a tall radio studio cabinet full of classical LPs and CDs. The Account Executive pulls out an LP with astonishment.*

**ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE**

O mamma!

Take a peak

At this antique.

(*She hands it to the Marketing Research Director who looks at it in disgust. During this next section, the Account Executive pulls out one album at a time—pronouncing the name of the composer—and then hands it to the Marketing Research Director who tosses it away into a huge plastic trash barrel. They enjoy the game more with each exchange.*)

**ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE / MARKETING RESEARCH**

Ravel? Won't Sell. Bizet? No way. Sibelius? Get serious.

Britten? You're kiddin'. Franck? He stank! Liszt? Not missed!

Bach? A crock! Gluck? The snook! Mozart? An old fart!

Puccini? A weenie! Tchaikovsky? He's out-skie!

(*They now begin joyously dumping LPs and CDs by the armful*)

**TRIO**

The past is over.

Let's clean house.

Out with Verdi.

Goodbye Strauss.

Trade in Wagner

For smooth soft rock.

The future starts

At twelve o'clock.

Classical music's

Gotta go.

All the surveys

Tell us so.

Brahms is boring.

Bach is dreary.

Morning drive-time

Should be cheery.

Grieg is stale.

Mozart mouldy.

Give us this day

Our golden oldie.

Tschaikovsky's pathetic.

Schubert's a nerd.

And once is too much

For Beethoven's third.

Curtains for opera.

Unstring that cello.

Make the music

Soft and mellow.

Whether you're driving

Or trying to score,

Lean back, relax

While our ratings soar.

Mile after mile

Commute with a smile.

So bye-bye Beethoven,

And don't touch that dial!

**[7] SCENE SEVEN**

*Center stage: Tony is sitting at the microphone when the back door opens flooding the room with a dramatic shaft of light silhouetting a beautiful woman. She enters slowly to music that announces her importance. She does not speak, but her demeanor reveals her command of the situation.*

**CARUSO**

Who are you?

(*The woman does not respond*)

**CARUSO**

Who are you?

**CALLAS**

Oh, don't be tiresome. You know who I am.

You summoned me.

**CARUSO**

I didn't summon anyone.

**CALLAS**

Why bother to deny the obvious?  
You've wanted me. You've dreamed of me for years.  
(*He pauses for a moment—staring at her*)

**CARUSO**

Maria Callas? But you're dead.

**CALLAS**

And you are rude! I hoped I would receive  
A better welcome from my leading man.

**CARUSO**

Callas? How can it be? Callas?

**CALLAS**

Hopeless! Is this the entrance I deserve?  
She slowly gestures to him in the grand style.  
This stuttering, imbecilic . . . amateur!

**CARUSO**

I'm sorry. I am . . .

**CALLAS**

You're always sorry. That is your greatest talent.

**CARUSO**

I always tried to learn from you.

**CALLAS**

You tried, perhaps, but you failed.

**CARUSO**

Why did I fail? I worked. I studied.

I loved my art.

**CALLAS**

You wanted love without its pain.

**CARUSO**

Why have you come here?

**CALLAS**

No, tell me first why you have dreamed of me.

**CARUSO**

I always wished I could have sung with you.

**CALLAS**

A common wish. And do you think that I  
Have come tonight to grant it?

**CARUSO**

I don't know.

**CALLAS**

Listen!

*ARIA*

*I. Cavatina*

I have not come for you.  
I come here to perform,  
To show you what you might have been.  
I'm nothing but the role I play—  
Nothing and everything.  
They claim that my career was short.  
You know it was the longest ever.  
No other singer burned as hot,  
As brightly, or as long as I—  
Nothing and everything.  
You understand what critics don't.  
They call us stars because we burn  
In darkness—cold, remote, and bright,  
Unreachable, unaging—  
Nothing and everything!

*II. Cabaletta*

To be divine  
A woman must die,  
Offer her flesh  
To satisfy  
A freezing fire,  
Fed and sustained  
By pure desire,

That burns so bright  
It fills the sky.

To be divine

A woman must die,  
Seeking the pain  
To magnify

A sacrifice

That makes her seem

Both fire and ice,

A star to pierce

The darkest sky.

**CALLAS**

Your time has come.

Now sing with me.

Burn me. Dazzle me.

**CARUSO**

Give me a moment.

I'm not ready yet.

I haven't prepared.

**CALLAS**

You've had a lifetime to prepare.

What is our art but practice,

An endless preparation,

The way a girl will spend long years

Trying to grow more beautiful

For lovers she does not yet know?

**CARUSO**

Give me a moment.

**CALLAS**

I've given you too much already.

**CARUSO**

Just a moment . . .

**CALLAS**

Too late.

**CARUSO**

Let me try . . .

**CALLAS**

A singer who misses his entrance must be left behind.

**CARUSO**

Please let me try . . .

**CALLAS**

Find someone else to sing with you.

(*She turns to go*)

**CARUSO**

Wait. I'll try. Let me try . . .

**CALLAS**

You try. Others give their lives.

Goodbye.

(*She leaves. The stage darkens except for a narrow spotlight on Tony. Then spotlight fades to darkness.*)

**[8] SCENE EIGHT**

*Radio station: stage center. The soundbooth lights up.*

**INTERN**

What a great show. People keep calling to say how much they're  
going to miss Tony. One woman was even crying.

**ENGINEER**

We're the ones who should be crying!  
Tony sounds great tonight, but he looks like hell.

**INTERN**

He does look bad, and he's still got almost an hour to go.  
Maybe we should end early.

**ENGINEER**

No way. Tony would rather die than end early.

(*Center stage darkens but not all the way to black. The Intern and the Engineer freeze in silhouette.*)

**[9] SCENE NINE**

*Stage left: lights up to reveal the Priest and the Nun, both visibly aged. The Priest, who is now blind, sits in a wheelchair.*

**PRIEST**

How nice to talk about old times, sister.  
Most of what I do now is remember. By the way, whatever happened to little Tony Caruso?  
What a voice that boy had.

**NUN**

He never did much with it.  
He's a radio announcer somewhere.

**PRIEST**

What a shame to fail at something you love.

**NUN**

He never tried hard enough. He was a dreamer.

**PRIEST**

Still, it must hurt to waste a gift like that.

**NUN**

Getting through any life hurts.  
The only thing to do with pain is offer it up to God.

**PRIEST**

Yes, offer it up.  
*He starts to hum a tune.*  
Do you remember that old hymn, sister?  
*He hums a little more.*

**NUN**

Is this the one?

*SPIRITUAL*

**NUN**

Help us bear this load of sorrow.  
Help us through this night of fear.  
God, protect us till tomorrow,  
As we walk this path of tears.

**PRIEST**

Help me bear this load of sickness  
Where the darkness never clears.

**NUN & PRIEST**

God, protect us till tomorrow,  
As we walk this path of tears.

*(Center stage: lights up an Engineer)*

**ENGINEER**

Help me bear this load of anger,  
Which grows heavier with the years.

**ALL THREE**

God, protect us till tomorrow,  
As we walk this path of tears.  
*(Spotlight on Intern)*

**INTERN**

Help me bear this load of worry.  
Help my loneliness and fears.

**ALL FOUR**

God, protect us till tomorrow,  
As we walk this path of tears.  
*(Stage right: lights up on Marketing Trio. They sing as one.)*

**MARKETING TRIO**

Help us bear this load of envy.  
Lead us when no guide appears.

**ALL SEVEN**

God, protect us till tomorrow,  
As we walk this path of tears.

**ALL**

Jesus walked the road before us.  
Jesus felt these trials and fears.  
Jesus, please be there to guide us,  
As we walk this path of tears.  
*(Dark)*

**[10] SCENE TEN**

*Center stage Radio Studio: the studio is dark except for a spotlight on Tony who sits at the announcer's console sorting through disks and records in a state of agitation.*

**ANNOUNCER** *(Spoken offstage)*

As we near the end of our last broadcast day, W-E-Z-Y wishes to thank our listeners for their years of loyal support. The time is 11:45 P.M. Now we rejoin Antonio Caruso for the final segment of *Opera Lover*.

**CARUSO**

There's only time for one more number.  
So many possibilities . . .  
Which one to choose?

A love scene? A mad scene?  
A death scene? Which one? Which one?

*(As he shuffles through his recordings, the door at the back of the studio opens revealing a dark woman silhouetted against the frame of the door. She slowly approaches Tony without him noticing. Silently she puts her hand on his shoulder. He looks up startled.)*

**CARUSO**

Who . . . ? *(softly)*  
The woman gently signals him to be silent.

**WOMAN**

It's time to end.  
I've come to help you end.

**CARUSO**

But who are you?

**WOMAN**

I am the one you've waited for.

**CARUSO**

You remind me of someone.

**WOMAN**

Every woman that you've ever loved  
In silence or despair,  
Every song you've never sung.  
I am the one you've waited for,  
And now it's time to choose your ending.

**CARUSO**

What song should I choose?

**WOMAN**

What do you want to find?

**CARUSO**

Everything I've ever lost.

**WOMAN**

Nothing ever lost returns.

**CARUSO**

Then what is left?

**WOMAN**

Everything else.  
Everything you lacked  
The courage to possess.

**CARUSO**

Who are you?

**WOMAN**

Haven't you guessed by now?

**CARUSO**

I am afraid to guess.

**WOMAN**

You are afraid too much,  
But now it isn't you  
Who makes the choices.  
You only get to choose  
How we should end.  
I'll ask again.

How do you wish to end?

**CARUSO** *(in a whisper)*

With passion.

**WOMAN**

What?

**CARUSO**

Passion!

The passion that I've always felt,  
But never had the chance to live.

*DUET*

**WOMAN**

Now is the moment,  
As midnight arrives,  
When time will unravel  
Our separate lives.  
The music must stop.  
The lights must go black.  
Where will you go  
When there's no turning back?

**CARUSO**

Now is the moment,  
As midnight arrives,  
When payment is due  
On the loan of our lives.  
Will I be heard  
Or will I stand dumb?  
After the music  
Only silence will come.

**WOMAN**

Do you remember what you've lost?

**CARUSO**

Every moment of every night.

**WOMAN**

Do you remember whom you've lost?

**CARUSO**

Every detail etched by old desire.

**WOMAN**

Remember . . .

*ARIA*

**CARUSO**

Memories of love are midnight's poison,  
The slow venom that will not kill,  
The drink that renders thirst unending,  
Drawn from the rivers of hell.  
Memories of loss are midnight's passion,  
The cross it carries to the bone-covered hill,  
The pain that offers no redemption,  
But the slow descent to hell.  
Memories of love are midnight's prison.  
The heart's dark inescapable cell.  
Tear off the lock, pull down the walls,  
You still remain in hell.

**WOMAN**

If that is memory,  
Give up the past.  
If that is life,  
Leave it behind.  
And choose another way—  
With me.

*DUET*

**WOMAN**

Now leave your fears and your sorrows behind.  
Midnight approaches, and I am here.  
What you desire have the courage to find.  
The end of your pain is near.  
Now let your voice and mine combine.  
Ours is the song you ache to sing.  
You are the song, and the song is mine—  
The music you were made to sing.

**CARUSO**

Now leave my fears and my sorrows behind.  
Midnight approaches, and you are here.  
What I desire I'll have courage to find.  
The end of my pain is here.  
Let my voice and yours combine.  
Ours is the song I ache to sing.  
You are the song, and your song is mine—  
The music I was made to sing.

**WOMAN**

Do you take me as your lover?

**CARUSO**

Yes.

**WOMAN**

Forever?

**CARUSO**

Yes, forever.

**TOGETHER**

*(As they sing the duet, the stage darkens except for a spotlight on the lovers.)*

*DUET FINALE*

**WOMAN & CARUSO**

Only us and only now.  
Beyond the dark, beyond desire—  
The song we make together.  
Love requires only one  
Reciprocate its melody,  
Two dreamers locked in unison.  
Only us and only now,  
Nothing else that we desire  
Beyond the song we make together.  
Love and darkness now are one.  
Sleep in my arms and you will find  
Ecstasy in oblivion.  
Only us and only now  
Lost in the sleep we both desire  
In the night we share together—  
This night we sing together.  
*(They exit together through a lighted door.)*