

*Virginia  
Opera*

*Cavalleria Rusticana /  
I Pagliacci*

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Ruggiero Leoncavallo

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# CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

by  
Pietro Mascagni

Libretto  
by  
Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci

after a short story and play by  
Giovanni Verga

# I PAGLIACCI

by  
Ruggiero Leoncavallo

Libretto  
by  
Ruggiero Leoncavallo

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# CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

## Premiere

First performance at Teatro Constanzi on May 17, 1890, in Rome, Italy.

## Cast of Characters

<b>Santuzza</b> , a peasant girl.....	Soprano
<b>Mamma Lucia</b> , Turriddu's mother.....	Mezzo Soprano
<b>Alfio</b> , a carter.....	Baritone
<b>Turriddu</b> , a young soldier.....	Tenor
<b>Lola</b> , Alfio's wife.....	Mezzo Soprano
<b>Villagers and peasants</b> .....	Chorus

## Brief Summary

Setting: A Sicilian village, turn of the century

It is Easter Sunday and the villagers are gathering for mass. Santuzza arrives asking Mamma Lucia about her son Turriddu. She is upset because she feels abandoned by him after he promised to marry her. After the villagers enter the church Santuzza tells Lucia her sad story. Turriddu is having an affair with Lola, his former fiancé, who married Alfio while Turriddu was away on military duty. Now Turriddu is ignoring Santuzza even though she is pregnant. She confronts Turriddu as he follows Lola into the church, but is angrily rebuffed. In a fit of jealousy and anger she denounces Turriddu to Lola's husband Alfio. Alfio vows vengeance and Santuzza feels remorseful. After the Easter mass Turriddu invites the crowd into his mother's wine shop and they all enjoy a rousing song. The happy mood changes when Alfio enters the shop. The two men confront each other and exchange sharp words. Alfio challenges Turriddu in the traditional Sicilian manner. After Alfio leaves for their fight, Turriddu asks for his mother's blessing and requests that she take care of Santuzza if he does not return. He emotionally begs for his mother's kiss and runs off. Santuzza rushes in and embraces Lucia. With rising tension they await the outcome. Suddenly a woman runs in and shrieks that Turriddu has been murdered. Mamma Lucia cries out and Santuzza falls fainting to the ground.

# CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

## Full Plot Synopsis and Musical Highlights

### Prelude

The opening prelude introduces several musical themes which will recur throughout the opera and establishes the contrast between the peaceful religious atmosphere of Easter Sunday and the dark violent passions that are simmering beneath the surface. The gentle music of the Easter hymn is followed by an ominous theme representing Santuzza's jealousy, and finally the tender, passionate music of Santuzza's plea for Turriddu's love is introduced. The orchestral introduction is interrupted by Turriddu's voice singing the "Siciliana," a serenade to Lola, pledging his undying love. It is written in the style of a traditional Sicilian folk song and sung to a simple harp accompaniment, suggestive of a guitar, the instrument most used in a serenade. The use of a human voice in the prelude of an opera was very unconventional. After the serenade the orchestra returns to the musical themes previously introduced. The prelude ends peacefully, as it began.

### Act I

With the sound of church bells the curtain rises on a village square in Sicily. It is dawn. Two structures dominate the square, the massive church and the wine shop and tavern of Mamma Lucia. The villagers enter the square singing of the beauties of springtime and love, accompanied by gay, festive music. Some go into the church while others go about their business. The mood changes abruptly as the music grows somber with a note of impending tragedy. Santuzza enters and approaches Mamma Lucia anxiously asking after Turriddu. When Lucia tells her that he has gone to a neighboring town to buy wine, Santuzza protests that he was seen the previous night in their own village. Confused, Lucia invites Santuzza into the house to continue their conversation in private. Santuzza declines, explaining that she has been excommunicated and cannot enter the house of a good Catholic. Apprehensively Lucia asks what Santuzza knows about Turriddu.

Before she can answer, the jingle of bells and the cracking of a whip announce the arrival of Alfio, the village carter and husband of Lola. He is followed by admiring men and women who join in a lively song about the joys of the carter's life, "Il cavallo scalpita," (The horses hooves thunder). After being on the road, driving from village to village, he is glad to be home and looks forward to seeing his wife. When the song ends, Alfio asks Mamma Lucia if she can sell him some of his favorite wine. She explains that Turriddu has gone to the village of Francofonte to replenish her supply. Alfio questions this because he has just seen Turriddu near his own house. Lucia is disturbed but Santuzza signals her not to say anything. Alfio leaves to prepare for church as the square begins to fill with villagers going to Easter Mass.

From inside the church a choir begins the majestic hymn, "Regina Coeli," (Queen of Heaven), accompanied by the sound of an organ. The villagers outside the church respond with hallelujahs. They kneel in prayer and join in the fervent hymn as a religious procession passes through the square and into the church. Although Santuzza may not enter the church, she joins in the singing of the Easter hymn, "Inneggiamo, il Signor non è morto," (Let us

rejoice that our Lord is not dead), her voice rising passionately above the others. The chorus swells in intensity and builds to a great, dramatic climax before the villagers go into the church. Mamma Lucia and Santuzza remain alone in the square. Lucia asks Santuzza why she had motioned her to keep quiet earlier. Santuzza replies in an aria, "Voi lo sapete," (You know it), relating her whole sad story. Before he left for military service Turriddu had been in love with Lola and the two were engaged to be married. When he returned from the army he found that Lola had not waited but had married Alfio. In his despair Turriddu had turned to Santuzza for consolation and she had become his lover. Now Lola, out of envy and jealousy, has lured Turriddu back to her. While the two are having an affair Santuzza has been left alone and pregnant and Turriddu has ignored his promise to marry her. Abandoned and excommunicated, all Santuzza can do is weep and pray for him to return. Lucia is horrified. Santuzza asks her to pray for her soul while she waits to speak with Turriddu.

Mamma Lucia has left and Turriddu, arriving in the square, and heads for the wine shop. Surprised and uncomfortable at seeing Santuzza, he asks her why she isn't in church. "Tu qui, Santuzza?" (You here, Santuzza?) begins their dramatic scene and duet which proceeds through four sections of increasing tension and confrontation. Santuzza wants Turriddu to say where he has been. When he responds that he was in Francofonte buying wine she confronts him with her knowledge that he was at Lola's house. Angrily he accuses her of spying and berates her for being suspicious. When she insists that he still loves Lola, he denies it. Turriddu defiantly warns Santuzza to leave him alone while she wretchedly reaffirms her love for him. They are suddenly interrupted by the voice of Lola who enters singing a frivolous, happy tune which greatly contrasts with the music of the duet. Her song is a flirtatious, insinuating little aria, "Fior di gaggiolo," (O flower of the iris), directed at Turriddu. It is clear that she is heartless and shallow. She feigns surprise when she sees them and asks Turriddu if he has seen Alfio. Turriddu is flustered and embarrassed. When Lola mockingly asks if they are going to church, Santuzza replies darkly that only those free of sin may enter. Brazenly, Lola gives thanks to the Lord that she is sinless. This evokes another bitter response from Santuzza. Lola starts into the church. When Turriddu tries to follow her she stops him, flippantly telling him to stay with Santuzza and uttering a blessing on them both. After Lola enters the church Turriddu turns furiously on Santuzza and the duet continues. Santuzza pleads with him not to abandon her, singing the passionate, moving melody already introduced in the Prelude. He continues to upbraid her, telling her once more to leave him alone. Again the confrontation builds in intensity. When Santuzza tries to physically prevent him from following Lola into the church, Turriddu violently throws her to the ground, and goes in. Beside herself, Santuzza screams, "A te la mala Pasqua, spergiuro!" (May your Easter be cursed, you traitor!)

A moment later Alfio enters, accompanied by a dark, ominous version of his carter's song. Santuzza regains her composure and approaches him saying that the Lord himself has sent him her way at this moment. She blurts out the entire story that Lola is betraying him with Turriddu. Stunned, Alfio threatens to tear out her heart if she is lying. She replies that in her shame and sorrow she told him the truth. Alfio thanks her calmly, then his anger explodes as he vows vengeance. Their duet ends in a fiery cabaletta, "Ad essi non perdono," (I will not forgive them), with Santuzza crying in remorse at having betrayed Turriddu and Alfio planning his revenge.

A pause in the stage action ensues while the orchestra plays a Symphonic Intermezzo. This represents the passage of time as the church service concludes. After the fierce, violent passions of the preceding scene, a calm, devotional mood returns as the orchestra reprises the opening strains of the *Regina Coeli*. This serves as a reminder that these unholy events are taking place on Easter, a day of peace and piety. A haunting new theme is then introduced, suggesting both the religious fervor and the passion of love around which the opera revolves. The Symphonic Intermezzo is the most famous excerpt from the score and is a favorite concert piece.

At the conclusion of the Intermezzo the church bells ring and the opera's opening music returns. The villagers pour out of the church into the square singing a folk-like chorus. When Turriddu and Lola emerge from the church he invites his friends to join him at his mother's wine shop. Filling their glasses, he leads them in a rousing drinking song, "Viva il vino spumeggiante," (Long live the sparkling wine). When Alfio enters everyone greets him cordially and Turriddu offers him a glass. Alfio refuses, saying that the wine would turn to poison inside him. The jolly mood quickly darkens as Turriddu acknowledges the insult by spilling the wine on the ground. The two men confront each other tensely. A frightened Lola is ushered away by the women. Alfio and Turriddu exchange a few sharp words then give a challenge in the traditional Sicilian manner. The two men embrace and Turriddu bites Alfio's ear. They agree to meet behind the orchard wall and Alfio leaves.

Turriddu calls out to his mother, the music suggesting his underlying fear. Lucia enters and Turriddu sings a dramatic aria, "Mamma, quell vino è generosa," (Mama, that wine is strong). He says he must go out for a walk to clear his head of the strong wine, and asks her to bless him before he goes. Then, passionately he pleads with her to take care of Santuzza should he not return because he had promised to marry her. Confused, the old woman asks why he is speaking so strangely. He blames it on the wine once again. Then in an outburst of emotion he asks his mother to kiss him and repeats his plea that she look after Santuzza. After asking for one last kiss, he says goodbye and rushes off.

Alarmed, Mamma Lucia starts to follow him, calling his name. Santuzza arrives and embraces her. The tension in the orchestra intensifies as people begin to crowd nervously into the square. Voices are heard murmuring in the distance. Suddenly a woman runs in crying, "Hanno ammazzato compare Turriddu!" (Turriddu has been killed!). Everyone cries out in horror and Santuzza and Lucia fall fainting to the ground.

# CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

## Historical Background

Mascagni's opera was based on Giovanni Verga's story and play of the same name. Verga's very popular play was produced in 1884 with the famous Eleanora Duse acting the part of Santuzza. It was performed all over Italy and initiated the *verismo* period in Italian theater. The location of the original story was, in actuality, the hometown of Giovanni Verga. It was a small, nearly-forgotten mountain village in Sicily called Vizzini. Verga had become a successful writer when he focused on his Sicilian roots. He used authentic local dialects and wrote realistically about Sicilian passions, virtues, prejudices and folklore. Mascagni saw the play within a month of its opening but did not think of it as the basis for an opera at that time. Some four years later, he was preparing to enter a competition for one-act operas sponsored by the publishing house Casa Sonzogno. He quickly contacted a friend about writing a libretto. This friend, Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti, suggested the Verga play and Mascagni readily agreed. A second librettist, Guido Menasci, was brought in to speed up the process. The libretto strictly adhered to the play and was completed in December 1888. Mascagni worked eighteen hours a day to complete his opera by the deadline. The publishing house chose three finalists and arranged for the three works to be staged. Public response would decide the winner. Mascagni was notified on May 6, 1890, that his opera was a finalist. He left immediately for Rome to supervise the rehearsals and make any last minute changes. Just eleven days later CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA had its first performance and was a stunning success. There were dozens of curtain calls. For a young composer of twenty-five, the instant fame was almost overwhelming. His state of mind is captured in a letter he wrote to his father two days after the premiere,

“Dear Father, the intense excitement makes it impossible for me to tell you in detail about the day before yesterday which was quite astonishing. I still haven't got over the emotion and confusion. I could never have imagined such enthusiasm: in the stalls and boxes they were all on their feet, even the orchestra stood up to give me a colossal ovation. All the ladies, including the Queen, applauded. It was a colossal success, the likes of which had never been seen. You will already have seen this in the papers which all say the same thing. One thing has touched me particularly... This morning Ricordi sent me a telegram offering to buy the opera. But in gratitude I have already signed a contract with Sonzogno which will earn me twelve or fifteen thousand lire for two and a half years. The first prize is mine. Sonzogno have awarded me 300 lire a month. My situation has changed completely. I'm going crazy...”

Within the next 18 months, CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA was acclaimed around the world, performed at all the major opera houses. It has proved its staying power by maintaining its strong popularity and has served as a rite of passage for generations of international opera stars through the vocal prowess required by the two principal characters, Turiddu and Santuzza. The *verismo* period in Italy lasted about ten years before the incomparable Giacomo Puccini would become the driving force in Italian opera, establishing his own unique synthesis of style and content. The elements of

*verismo* style can be discerned in the works of many composers, including Puccini, well into the twentieth century.

# CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

## The Composer Mascagni

Pietro Mascagni was born the son of a baker in Livorno, Italy, on December 7, 1863. From an early age he wanted to become a musician but his father disapproved and insisted he study law. Instead, Mascagni studied music secretly. By the time he was sixteen he had composed a *Symphony in C major* and a *Kyrie*. As he made progress with his music he eventually gained the acceptance of his father. He studied at the Milan Conservatory under the well known composer Amilcare Ponchielli and was a fellow student of Giacomo Puccini. Mascagni found the training to be tedious and the rules too strict. Eventually he left the Conservatory to become the conductor of a traveling opera company. By 1887 he was tired of the traveling life, and settled in the town of Cerignola, where he married. He was employed as the town music master and theater director for 100 lire per month.

The following months became increasingly difficult as a result of an economic downturn. Mascagni wrote letters to friends, including Puccini, in which he expressed his increasing desperation. In 1888 the opportunity arose to write an opera for a competition sponsored by the publishing house Casa Sonzogno. The competition was for one-act operas and the winning finalists would have their operas staged in Rome. Seventy-two aspiring composers entered the competition. Mascagni's opera CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA won the first prize and was produced by the publishers at the Teatro Constanzi in Rome on May 17, 1890. The opera was an instant success and brought fame and fortune to the young Mascagni. Within eighteen months CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA had been staged at all the major opera houses around the world.

Mascagni next wrote the opera, *L'Amico Fritz*, which enjoyed some success but the majority of his other operas have faded into obscurity. His opera *Iris*, composed in 1898, was very popular and still receives occasional revivals, as does *L'Amico Fritz*. Mascagni wrote a total of fifteen operas, an operetta, several beautiful orchestral and vocal works, as well as songs and piano music. He also enjoyed great success as a conductor, primarily at La Scala in Milan. He is considered a "one-opera composer" by many because none of his subsequent operas achieved the stunning level of success of his CAVALLERIA. Mascagni did not compose all his operas in the *verismo* vein, employing a variety of styles in the operas that followed CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA.

Later in his life Mascagni became the official composer of the Fascist government of Italy. In 1935 he composed the opera *Nerone*, which was staged at La Scala in Milan. He wrote the opera as a tribute to Benito Mussolini. In 1940 he personally conducted a star-studded production of CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA at La Scala to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary. His association with Mussolini led to his disgrace after the fall of the Fascist regime in 1943. Mascagni ended his days in poverty, living in a single room in Rome. He died in Rome on August 2, 1945.

# CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

## Verismo in Opera

*Verismo* is an Italian word derived from the Latin *veritas*, meaning truth. It is the term used to describe the realistic or naturalistic school of Italian opera popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is typified by the works of Pietro Mascagni, Ruggiero Leoncavallo, and Giacomo Puccini. *Verismo* or realism is related to the literary movement of naturalism which grew out of a desire to move away from Romanticism and its idealistic spirit. Concerned with the harsh and often victimized lives of the lower classes, this type of opera drew its characters and situations from common life, rather than the idealized figures of early nineteenth century opera. The plots of *verismo* operas are characteristically fast-moving, violent and sensational, with little elaboration or filler material and uncomplicated characters.

Though essentially an Italian phenomenon, the first truly “veristic” opera was French. Produced in 1875, Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* created a sensation and a scandal in Paris. Many of the genteel French audience were horrified by a plot depicting smugglers, thieves, murderers and a blatantly sexual heroine. There were others who were intrigued by a story that involved basic, primal human emotions. The French produced few other operas in this vein, though Jules Massenet, the famous composer of *Manon*, contributed to the genre with *La Navarraise*.

Pietro Mascagni is credited with writing the first Italian *verismo* opera. His CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA, which premiered in 1890, presented a torrid, unsophisticated tale of love and death among Sicilian peasants. The tremendous success of this one-act work inspired the composer Ruggiero Leoncavallo to create his own one-act opera, I PAGLIACCI. It received equally as popular a reception as did Mascagni’s work. Because of their short duration, with each opera lasting about seventy-five minutes, and the homogenous styles of their stories and musical scores, these two works are usually played together as a double-bill. They are viewed as the prototypical *verismo* works. In Virginia Opera’s production the two operas are given the same setting, in the same village with the story of the first opera followed closely by the second.

Other *verismo* operas include Puccini’s *Il Tabarro*, the story of a love triangle among lower-class Parisians, Puccini’s *La Fanciulla del West*, Montemezzi’s *L’Amore dei Tre Re*, Giordano’s *Andrea Chenier* and *Fedora*, and Manuel de Falla’s *La Vida Breve*. American composer Gian Carlo Menotti has been a primary advocate of *verismo* in the later twentieth century with such works as *The Medium* and *The Consul*. An additional example of the use of *verismo* in American opera is Carlisle Floyd’s *Susannah*.

# CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

## Discussion Questions

1. Do you consider the story of CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA to be relevant today?
2. Discuss the use of musical and dramatic contrasts in the opera.
3. What moods are depicted and what devices are used to change the mood?
4. CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA is a type of opera called *verismo* (realistic). What elements make the opera realistic?
5. What is the purpose of the orchestral *Intermezzo* which occurs in the middle of the opera?
6. Santuzza is treated as an outcast in the village because of public awareness of her illicit relationship with Turriddu. Would she be treated the same way today?
7. The title of the opera translates as “Rustic Chivalry.” How does the title describe the outcome of the opera? Was the outcome fair and equitable?
8. Is Turriddu a hero or an antihero?
9. What is the difference in treatment between the two women who have broken the rules of their society? Why is one treated more harshly than the other?
10. What is the role of the Church in the story?
11. Does Turriddu know he is going to die? Does he go to his death willingly?
12. Does the fact that the duel takes place off stage lessen its impact?
13. Alfio is the wronged husband. Why does his music make him sound sinister at times. Is he a sympathetic character?
14. Discuss the similarities between CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA and I PAGLIACCI.

# I PAGLIACCI

## Premiere

First performance at Teatro dal Verme on May 21, 1892, in Milan, Italy.

## Cast of Characters

<b>Tonio</b> (Taddeo in the play), a deformed clown .....	Baritone
<b>Canio</b> (Pagliaccio in the play), head of the troupe.....	Tenor
<b>Nedda</b> (Columbina in the play), Canio's young wife .....	Soprano
<b>Beppe</b> (Arlecchino in the play), a clown.....	Tenor
<b>Silvio</b> , a villager.....	Baritone
<b>Villagers and peasants</b> .....	Chorus

## Brief Summary

Setting: A Sicilian village, turn of the century

Tonio steps in front of the curtain and announces he is the Prologue. He reminds the audience that the story is not just fiction but will be a scene from life with the actors expressing real human feelings.

The curtain rises as a troupe of traveling actors arrive to perform in a small town. As they set up and advertise their next show it is clear that the leader Canio is very jealous of any attention his young wife Nedda receives from men. After Canio goes to the tavern, Tonio tells Nedda he loves her and tries to kiss her. She violently rejects him, slashing him with a whip. He leaves, swearing revenge. Nedda's secret lover Silvio appears. He convinces her to run away with him. Tonio overhears some of the conversation and gets Canio. Canio threatens Nedda with a knife to reveal the name of her lover. She refuses. Beppe disarms Canio. Left alone, Canio laments that he must play the clown and make people laugh even though his heart is breaking. The audience arrives and the play begins. The clown Pagliaccio, played by Canio, finds his wife Columbina, played by Nedda, betraying him with Arlecchino, played by Beppe. As the comedy proceeds, Canio is overcome by the similarity with his own situation and forgets that they are all acting in a play. When Columbina, refuses to name her lover, Pagliaccio picks up a knife and stabs her. The dying Nedda calls out to Silvio who rushes forward. Canio stabs him as well. Canio lets the knife fall to the ground and in a dazed voice announces to the horrified audience that the play is over.

# I PAGLIACCI

## Full Plot Synopsis and Musical Highlights

### Prologue

The lively opening theme represents the players of the *commedia dell'arte*, Pagliaccio and Columbina. After further orchestral development, a sad, mournful motive representing the tormented Canio is heard in the french horns. The brief statement of Canio's motive is followed by the lyrical theme associated with Nedda's secret lover, Silvio. The opening theme returns and Tonio steps through the curtain, costumed as Taddeo the clown. He explains that in the true tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* he will speak a Prologue to the play. The author of the work, he says, wishes to make use of the authentic characters and conventions of the *commedia*, but with a special intent. He wishes to show that the substance of the play is the reality of human love and hatred, and that the emotions felt by the actors are sincere, not false. This story, he says, is a true one. Finally, in a ringing phrase, Tonio (Taddeo) calls for the drama to begin. "Incominciamo!"

### Act I

The curtain rises as the sound of a bass drum and an out-of-tune trumpet herald the arrival of the theatrical troupe. It is a religious holiday, the Feast of the Assumption, and excited, gaily dressed villagers gather in anticipation of the players' entrance. The children are especially eager to see the clowns. The troupe arrives and parades amongst the villagers, and Canio, the leader, bangs his drum to get the attention of the noisy crowd. He introduces the members of his company and invites the villagers to attend the show that evening. When Tonio attempts to help Nedda down from the players' stage, Canio jealously boxes his ears and helps her himself. Some of the villagers ask the troupe to join them for a drink at the nearby tavern. Canio and Beppe accept, but Tonio says he wishes to remain behind. Jokingly, a villager suggests that Tonio wants to stay so that he can court Nedda. Canio is not amused by the jest, and, in an intense aria utilizing a jealousy motif, says that it is better not to make such jokes with him. To enact a betrayal on stage is one thing, he says, but if Nedda were to deceive him in real life, the story would end quite differently. Recovering himself, Canio says that he adores his wife, and as a proof gives Nedda a kiss before going off to the tavern with Beppe and the men. The sound of pipers is heard, and the vesper bells call the villagers to the church. They sing a chorus, "Don, Din Don," imitating the sounds of the bells, and exit.

Nedda, left alone, muses on Canio's jealous words, and nervously wonders if he suspects that she has a lover. Her mood changes as she basks in the mid-August sun and then notices a flock of birds passing by. She sings the charming *Ballatella*, "Stridono lassù," (The birds chirp up above), a lilting waltz-tune in which she expresses her longing to fly away and be free as the birds. Her song is received with applause from Tonio, who has reappeared and listened to her. He passionately declares his love for her. He tells her that even though people laugh at him because he is ugly and deformed, he too has a heart. She responds scornfully, and when he tries to kiss her she slashes a whip across his face. He leaves vowing she will pay for her actions.

Moments after he has gone, Silvio, the handsome young villager with whom Nedda is in love, arrives. In a sensuous duet, urges her to run away with him after the performance. She resists him at first, but as the music and his words grow more impassioned, she finally yields to his suggestion. They become so lost in the ecstasy of their love that they fail to notice Tonio, who sneaks in and observes

them for a moment. They are kissing farewell with the words, "Till tonight! And then I'll be yours forever!" when Tonio returns with Canio. Springing forward in rage, Canio chases after the escaping Silvio as Tonio laughs goatingly at Nedda. Canio returns, having failed to catch Silvio. Pulling out a dagger, he demands that Nedda tell him the name of her lover. When she refuses, he lunges toward her, but is stopped by Beppe, who has just arrived. Taking the knife from Canio, he begs him to control himself and prepare for the performance. Tonio tells Canio to wait for his revenge; it is most likely that Nedda's lover will come to the evening's performance and there betray his identity. Beppe, Tonio, and Nedda exit to begin preparations. Alone, Canio laments his fate in what is perhaps the most famous of all operatic tenor arias, "Vesti la giubba" (Put on the costume). Though his life has fallen apart and his heart is breaking, he must paint on a smile and make the people laugh. The public pays, and must be amused. The aria climaxes with the heart-wrenching phrase "Ridi, Pagliaccio!" (Laugh, Pagliaccio). He picks up his costume and starts toward the theater.

### **Orchestral Intermezzo**

The Intermezzo recalls the major musical themes of the opera. During the musical interlude, members of the troupe and the townspeople erect the play's stage and set out benches for the audience. The Intermezzo concludes on a melancholy note, echoing the "Ridi, Pagliaccio" theme.

### **Act II**

The musical character changes abruptly with a reprise of the bright chorus which opened the opera. The villagers pour into the theater, pushing and shoving to get the best seats. Hidden amidst the crowd is Silvio. The curtain of the little theater opens and the comedy begins. With almost painful irony, the frivolous *commedia* plot parallels the real-life situation of the actors. The orchestra plays a charming, capricious minuet which continues as a background to the scene. Nedda, dressed as Columbina, is pacing nervously. She informs the audience that her husband Pagliaccio will not be home until late, and then complains that the servant, Taddeo, has not yet returned from the market. The sound of the guitar tuning is heard, and Beppe enters, as Arlecchino, singing a serenade to Columbina. He disappears as Taddeo (Tonio) arrives, bringing Columbina a chicken. In a comical scene, the buffoonish Taddeo attempts to make love to Columbina, to the same underscoring that earlier accompanied Tonio's real-life protestations of love to Nedda. With deliberate emphasis, Tonio now sings that Columbina is as pure as the driven snow. This line is not lost on Canio, who waits backstage. Taddeo's wooing is cut short when Arlecchino pops in and sends him off with a swift kick in the pants.

To the strains of a playful *gavotte*, Arlecchino and Columbina greet each other lovingly and sit down to the meal which she has prepared. He gives her a vial of sleeping potion, telling her to give it to her husband so that they can later make their escape. Taddeo bursts in, warning the lovers that Pagliaccio is approaching. Arlecchino escapes, but Canio, as Pagliaccio, has heard Columbina's parting words, "Till tonight, and then I'll be yours forever." These are the same words he had overheard her say earlier, speaking to Silvio. The resemblance to real life is almost too much for Canio. With great difficulty, he makes his entrance. Canio attempts to follow the structure of the *commedia* story, accusing Columbina of infidelity and demanding to know the name of her lover. Nedda responds in character, denying everything. Finally, the thin line between illusion and reality causes Canio to break down. To passionate, violent music, he pulls off his wig and cries out that he is Pagliaccio no longer. Completely forgetting about the play, he bitterly reproaches himself for ever having helped Nedda, an orphan whom he found in the streets, took care of, and then foolishly grew to

love. His music is at first angry, then grows more lyrical and tender, filled with longing and despair. The audience is confused and wonders at the intensity of Canio's acting. Nedda vainly tries to call Canio to the comedy that is being played, nervously reprising the frivolous music of the gavotte. Canio, crazed with anger and jealousy, demands once more that she reveal her lover's name. Nedda at last steps out of character and defiantly refuses to answer. She cries out, "No, I will not speak, even if you kill me!" Suddenly, beside himself with pain and fury, Canio pulls out his knife and plunges it into her heart. The crowd shrieks in horror. The dying Nedda calls out for Silvio, who rushes to the stage only to be met by Canio's avenging blade. Stunned, the clown turns to the audience, gasping out the closing lines of the tragedy, "La commedia è finita!" (The comedy is over!), and then falls over his wife's lifeless body, sobbing.

# I PAGLIACCI

## Historical Background

As a young music student, it was Ruggiero Leoncavallo's dream to write both the libretto and the musical score for an opera and have it successfully staged. With the premier of I PAGLIACCI on May 21, 1892, he had realized his aspiration. He had chosen a subject he knew well, because this tragedy had actually occurred in his hometown of Naples when he was a boy. A group of traveling players had performed near his home and after the performance was over a jealous actor had murdered his wife. Leoncavallo's father was the judge at the ensuing trial. Thus, when Tonio speaks to the audience in the Prologue, he is representing the voice of Leoncavallo's boyhood.

Though IPAGLIACCI was based on an actual occurrence, the central dramatic idea, a play-within-a-play, during which a real murder is committed, had many precedents among dramatists. One French playwright, Catulle Mendès, had used this same dramatic device in his play, *La Femme de Tabarin*, in 1887, and sued Leoncavallo for plagiarism after the opera premiered. After hearing Leoncavallo's defense and its originality, he withdrew the suit and offered the composer a handsome apology.

Leoncavallo was inspired to write I PAGLIACCI after the success of Pietro Mascagni's opera CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA. Mascagni's opera was the first Italian *verismo* opera. *Verismo* is an Italian word derived from the Latin word *veritas*, meaning truth. It is the term used to describe the realistic or naturalistic school of Italian opera, popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and typified by the works of Mascagni, Leoncavallo, and Puccini. *Verismo* is related to the literary movement of naturalism which dominated creative thought during the second half of the nineteenth century. Inspired by the novels of Emile Zola, many writers, painters and eventually composers became concerned with the harsh and often victimized lives of the lower classes. *Verismo* opera drew its characters and plots from common life rather than the idealized figures of early nineteenth century opera. The settings of *verismo* operas are contemporary, the characters frequently poor and rustic, and the stories violent and sensational. I PAGLIACCI is a prototype work of the *verismo* genre.

Leoncavallo wrote the libretto and musical score of I PAGLIACCI in a five month period after which time the music publisher Sonzogno bought the opera after reading the libretto. It was staged in Milan under the baton of Arturo Toscanini. The preparation for the opera was grueling and Toscanini related that after the opera's first performance he came home so exhausted that he fell on his bed and slept all night in full dress, starched shirt and shoes. Difficulty with a donkey onstage had caused some embarrassing moments during the premiere. The donkey fell and interrupted the flow of the opera with kicking and braying, causing much laughter from the distracted audience. However, the premiere proved to be a runaway success and received many curtain calls. It was quickly presented in opera houses all over Europe and within two years had been translated into Czech, Russian, German, English, Swedish and French. This single achievement brought Leoncavallo lasting recognition and a permanent place in the operatic repertory. Since 1893 it has become a tradition to play I PAGLIACCI and CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA on a double bill because of their short durations and homogeneous styles. They complement one another with perfect balance and provide a gritty slice of life in a continuous flow of music and emotion.

# I PAGLIACCI

## Ruggiero Leoncavallo

Ruggiero Leoncavallo was born in Naples, Italy, on April 23, 1857, the son of a circuit court judge. He was a very bright child who was studying music at the Naples Conservatory by the age of nine. Of particular note was his composition teacher, Lauro Rossi, who was a well-known composer of French-style operas. In 1876, he continued his studies at Bologna University and was greatly influenced by the poet, Giosue Carducci, an ardent proponent of Richard Wagner. During this period he was also exposed to Wagner's *Rienzi* and *Der Fliegende Hollander*, and was greatly excited by the intellectual discussions that were associated with Wagner and his philosophy. Inspired by his studies and the controversy over the Wagnerian ideal, Leoncavallo wrote both the music and libretto for his first opera, *Chatterton*, by the time he was twenty.

Success came slowly, and he was forced to try his hand at various jobs in the music field. He worked as an accompanist, an opera coach and as a cafe pianist. He composed and played popular songs in music halls in various cities, and even traveled to Egypt in 1882 to work in a cafe. His ambition was to write both librettos and music for operas, with a special desire to write an operatic trilogy based on the Italian Renaissance. To this end he received a commission from the publishing house, Ricordi. Unfortunately his first effort, *I Medici*, failed to meet the publisher's expectations and ultimately caused difficulties between the parties that would last until 1899.

The success of Mascagni's opera, *CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA*, in 1890, inspired him to try his hand at the newly popular *verismo* style of composing. This time he chose a more contemporary subject, wrote the text and composed the music for *I PAGLIACCI* in just five months. It was produced in Milan at the Teatro dal Verme on May 21, 1892, when Leoncavallo was thirty-four years old. The conductor that evening was the young Arturo Toscanini. The opera was an immediate success and gave Leoncavallo overnight fame. In 1893, the Metropolitan Opera in New York featured *PAGLIACCI* as half of a double bill with Mascagni's work, and for more than a century the two operas have been presented together in a single evening.

Though he composed a total of sixteen operas, Leoncavallo was never able to equal the success of *I PAGLIACCI*. *I Medici* was performed in 1893 and *Chatterton* in 1896, but neither opera garnered much prominence. His version of *La Boheme*, written after a famous feud with Puccini, fell into obscurity as the rival composer's work became more popular. Leoncavallo's other best known work, *Zaza*, was very well received in its day, but it is rarely performed now. As his popularity declined in Italy, Leoncavallo looked to Germany where he found a willing audience for his work. In 1904, King Wilhelm II commissioned an opera to record the glorious deeds of the Hohenzollern dynasty, and the resulting opera, *Der Roland von Berlin*, received forty performances but no lasting success. His later years were marked by a shift to the composition of operettas and an interest in the early technology of the gramophone. This interest led to the recording of his song, *Mattinata*, by Enrico Caruso. At the time of his death in 1919, Leoncavallo was actively working on the opera, *Edipo Re*, which was commissioned by the Chicago Lyric Opera. This opera was completed by the composer Pennacchio and performed in Chicago seventeen months after Leoncavallo's death.

# I PAGLIACCI

## The Commedia dell'Arte

The traveling troupe of actors featured in Leoncavallo's opera are characters out of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. The *commedia* was a dramatic form that flourished in Italy from the sixteenth century and had a strong influence on drama and opera. Humorous and somewhat bawdy, it was devised as an entertainment for the common folk, as opposed to the more lofty, sophisticated dramas played before the courts and the upper classes. The traveling actors would journey from town to town, setting up a small platform stage and performing in the open air. The actors would decide on a plot situation and then improvise the dialogue around the scenario. Since nothing was prepared in advance, the shows all had a genuine feeling of spontaneity. Each actor portrayed a specific, stock character and always appeared in this one role, no matter what the plot was. All were identified by traditional costumes.

The most important were the *zanni*, whose slapstick routines included acrobatics and gags known as *lazzi*. The *zanni* were the essence of the *commedia*. They included the foolish, agile Arlecchino, the cunning Brighella, the cowardly Scapione, the cranky parent or guardian Pantalone, the ingénue Isabella, her saucy servant Columbina, and the hero Leandro or Florinda. Most of the characters were masked, except for the lovers. All were identified by traditional costumes, such as Arlecchino's diamond patterned suit and the clown Pulcinella's slack white costume with pom-poms down the front. Because the majority of characters were masked, the word "masks" were used as an identifier for these characters.

The plots of the *Commedia dell'Arte* were many and diverse. The confusion of disguise, mistaken identities, a lover pretending to be a servant and vice-versa, a couple of unknown origin who turn out to be brother and sister, young lovers thwarting the marriage plans of a miserly father – all these devices were used frequently in various transmutations. These plots and the *commedia* characters influenced numerous playwrights, including Shakespeare, Moliere and Beaumarchais. Since many opera libretti were drawn from the theater, the *commedia's* influence is present throughout the world of opera. The different character types in opera buffa are all drawn from the Italian comedy. For example, in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, which is based on the play by Beaumarchais, the character of Figaro, the wily servant, is based on Arlecchino, and Bartolo, the greedy, domineering old man, is suggested by Pantalone. In Mozart and Da Ponte's *Don Giovanni*, the servant Leporello is derived directly from the *commedia* character named Sganarelle. Operas such as *Don Pasquale*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *La Cenerentola*, and *Turandot* all employ characters and situations derived from the *commedia*.

There are several operas in the repertoire which utilize *commedia* characters in their pure, original form. In Richard Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos*, a *commedia* company including Arlecchino, Brighella, Truffaldino, Scaramuccio, and Zerbinetta, is hired to entertain at a party. The cast of *The Love of Three Oranges* by Prokofiev, includes Pantalone, Truffaldino, Leandro and Smeraldino. By far, the most popular of these operas is I PAGLIACCI, in which the normally innocuous *commedia* performance becomes a nightmare in which illusion and reality are fatally confused. Though the *Commedia dell'Arte* is still performed by troupes in present day Italy, and in America in the form of street theater, it is largely due to the enduring popularity of I PAGLIACCI that people still know about this classical and timeless art form.

# I PAGLIACCI

## Discussion Questions

1. Why has PAGLIACCI remained so popular?
2. Is adultery looked upon as a cause for murder today?
3. What is your reaction to Nedda's treatment of the hunchback Tonio?
4. Was part of Nedda's hostility to Tonio his physical appearance?
5. The literary device of a play-within-a-play is an ancient one. What great playwright used the same device? Can you think of other examples?
6. Compare the action of the play-within-a-play with that of the characters' real life situations.
7. How does Leoncavallo use dramatic irony?
8. What kind of character is Beppe? What purpose does he serve?
9. What is the effect of the Prologue?
10. How did the orchestra sustain and change the dramatic moods?
11. What characters do you feel compassion or sympathy for?
12. Do I PAGLIACCI and CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA make a good double bill?
13. How are the two operas similar?
14. What is the difference between drama and melodrama?



of the country's folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, and John Corigliano enjoy success both at home and abroad and are credited with the infusion of new life into an art form which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.



# The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving an unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<b><i>Soprano</i></b>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<b><i>Mezzo-Soprano</i></b>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)
<b><i>Tenor</i></b>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<b><i>Baritone</i></b>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	<b>Verdi Baritone</b> Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<b><i>Bass</i></b>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<b>Buffo Bass</b> Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	<b>Basso Cantate</b> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

# Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.



