



PUCCINI'S
Gianni Schicchi

&

LEOCAVALLO'S
I PAGLIACCI



Gianni Schicchi, English Synopsis:

Set in Florence in 1299.

The wealthy Buoso Donati has just died at home in Florence and his relatives are somewhat exaggerating in their mourning of his passing away; in reality they all expect to be amply consoled by their inheritance. But Betto di Signa, the poorest of them all, has heard strange rumors according to which Buoso has left all his possessions to the Friars Minor and the Charitable Works of Saint Reparata. Suspicious and worried, the relatives start looking for the will and, when they finally uncover it, they find their worst fears have come true. The false grief for the loss of their dear Buoso turns into an authentic lament for the loss of their inheritance. Also, the young Rinuccio is upset, for whom the money would have meant permission to marry a girl without a dowry, Lauretta, daughter of the commoner Gianni Schicchi.

In vain do Buoso's relatives turn to their elder, Simone, for advice on what to do; Rinuccio, however, suggests approaching Schicchi, well known for his shrewdness. The others reject this suggestion as the Donati family is above dealing with commoners, but by now Gianni, accompanied by his daughter Lauretta, has reached the house of the deceased, followed shortly after by the doctor, still unaware of the death of his patient. As soon as Gianni sees how to turn the situation to his own personal advantage, he hides in the bed of the deceased, imitates his voice and sends the doctor away, claiming that he feels better and wants to rest. Gianni Schicchi's plan is now put into practice. He dresses as Buoso, lies on his bed and summons the public notary, in front of whom he dictates a new will. He distributes the cash and some properties fairly among the relatives, but the most valuable assets – the house in Florence, the mills in Signa and the mule – he keeps for himself. The relatives can't do anything about it without revealing the fraud for which the penalty is the cutting-off of a hand and exile from Florence. Once the notary and witnesses have left, Gianni chases the enraged relatives out of the house before they can plunder what has now become his property, while Rinuccio and Lauretta happily embrace.

I Pagliacci, English Synopsis:

Set in a village in Calabria, Italy during the Feast of the Assumption in the 1860's.

Prologue: Tonio appears before the curtain to explain to the audience that the play they are about to see is no fantasy but is, "a picture of life," presenting the emotions and passions of real men and women.

Act I: The villagers hail the arrival of a troupe of strolling players. Canio, the head of the troupe, urges the crowd to attend the performance to be given that night then goes off with some of the villagers to the nearest tavern.

Tonio the hunchback, the clown of the company, remains behind. Finding Canio's wife, Nedda, alone, he takes the liberty of declaring his love for her. She scorns him. When he insists on a kiss, she grabs a whip and strikes him. Cringing with pain, Tonio swears that she will pay dearly for this.

No sooner has Tonio gone off than Silvio appears, a villager with whom Nedda has been having a romance. He tries to persuade her to leave her husband and run away with him. Nedda at first refuses, but ultimately gives in to Silvio's pleading. Tonio catches sight of the lovers and seeing his opportunity for revenge, runs off to fetch Canio. The enraged husband arrives just in time to hear Nedda promise that she will meet Silvio later that night. At Canio's approach Silvio escapes into the woods. Canio demands that Nedda reveal to him the name of her lover. She refuses. Canio, beside himself, is about to kill her when Peppe, another member of the troupe, stops him. Peppe reminds Canio that the villagers are assembling for the performance and tells Nedda to get dressed for the play. There follows Canio's famous outcry of despair. He must go on the stage as Pagliaccio, the Clown, and make people laugh, even though his heart is breaking.

Act 2: The excited villagers gather for the play. The play presented by the troupe centers around the theme that the trusting husband is deceived by a faithless wife. Tonio plays the part of the stupid servant, Taddeo, who declares his love for Columbine (Nedda), only to be scorned by her. Peppe plays the role of Columbine's lover, Harlequin. Their intimate little supper is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of the husband, Pagliaccio (Canio). Harlequin escapes through the window as Nedda promises to meet him later that night, using the same words as she did earlier to Silvio. As Canio proceeds to play his part, make-believe gradually retreats before the tragic reality of his situation. He insists that Nedda reveal the name of her lover. She laughs him off and tries to continue the comedy. But Canio reproaches her with her ingratitude and her betrayal. Nedda reminds Canio that she has never been a coward and persists in her refusal to name the man she loves. Canio seizes a knife from the table and stabs Nedda. With her last breath she cries out for Silvio, who has been watching the play. He runs to the stage to help her but is too late. Canio, now aware that Silvio was his wife's lover, stabs him to death. Amid the agitation of the horrified onlookers, Canio stands murmuring, "The comedy is ended!"